AN EXPLORATION OF STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF THE EMPLOYABILITY OF NATIONAL CERTIFICATE (VOCATIONAL) GRADUATES

By

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my late father, who with his little education, always encouraged me to study.

DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the stakeholder perceptions of the employability of National Certificate (Vocational) (NC(V)) graduates. Employability enhancement of NC(V) graduates in South Africa is important because it minimises the misconception that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges are not a suitable platform from which to produce qualified employees. A lack of employability of NC(V) graduates has a negative impact on the local economy and the future prospects of these youths. The study was conducted in Dutywa Town at the TVET college located within the Mbhashe Local Municipality in the Amathole District Municipality of the Eastern Cape province. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participants were selected using purposive sampling. The sample involved six NC(V) graduate returnees to the college involved in National Accredited Technical Diploma (NATED) programmes (n=6), three NC(V) lecturers (n=3), and four local employer representatives (n=4). Interviews were recorded after which data were transcribed. After the coding of the data, themes and categories were developed by means of content analysis. Based on the results in this study, it can be concluded that negative perceptions exist about the employability of NC(V) graduates in the study context. The findings show that NC(V) graduates do not possess the required skills, or struggle to acquire the skills they perceive as necessary for employment. The NC(V) graduates seem to be placed in a position of hopelessness where they cannot find assistance towards employability whether from their lecturers, the vocational institution, or potential employers. There also seemed to be little evidence of relations between the particular vocational institution and the employment industry included in the study. The TVET college is hampered by poor planning, while prospective employers have limited awareness about the NC(V) curriculum and its objectives. These factors underscore the dissatisfaction amongst stakeholders in terms of their employability.

Keywords: Employability; NC(V) graduates; vocational education

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie het belanghebbendes se persepsies van die indiensneembaarheid van afgestudeerde Nasionale Sertifikaat (Beroepsgerig) (NS(B))-studente ondersoek. Die verbetering van die indiensneembaarheid van NS(B)-afgestudeerdes in Suid-Afrika is belangrik omdat dit die wanpersepsie teëwerk dat TVET-kolleges nie 'n geskikte platform is om gekwalifiseerde werknemers te ontwikkel nie. Die gebrek aan indiensneembaarheid van NS(B)-afgestudeerdes het 'n negatiewe invloed op die plaaslike ekonomie en die toekomstige vooruitsigte van hierdie jongmense. Die studie is onderneem in die dorp Dutywa by die plaaslike TVET-kollege gesetel binne die Mbhashe Plaaslike Munisipaliteit in die Amathole Distrik-Munisipaliteit van die Oos-Kaap-provinsie. Data is ingesamel deur middel van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude en die deelnemers is deur doelgerigte steekproefneming geselekteer. Die steekproef het ses NS(B)-afgestudeerdes ingesluit wat teruggekeer het na die kollege en betrokke was in NATED-programme (n=6), asook drie NS(B)-dosente (n=3) en vier plaaslike werkgewerverteenwoordigers (n=4). Nadat onderhoude opgeneem is, is die data getranskribeer Die daaropvolgende data-kodering het tot die ontwikkeling van temas en kategorieë deur middel van inhoudsanalise gelei. Gebaseer op die bevindinge van hierdie studie, is die slotsom bereik dat daar negatiewe persepsies bestaan oor die indiensneembaarheid van NS(B)-afgestudeerdes binne die studiekonteks. Die bevindinge toon aan dat die NS(B)-afgestudeerdes nie oor die nodige vaardighede beskik nie, of sukkel om die vaardighede te bekom wat hul dink nodig is vir indiensname. Dit blyk dat die NS(B)-afgestudeerdes 'n gevoel van hopeloosheid ervaar omdat hulle nie bystand tot indiensname kan kry van hul dosente, die beroepsopleidingsinstelling, of potensiële werkgewers nie. Daar is ook min bewyse gevind van verstandhoudings tussen die betrokke beroepsopleidingsinstellings en die werkplekke wat in die studie ingesluit is. Die TVET-kollege word ondermyn deur swak beplanning, terwyl voornemende werkgewers beperkte bewustheid het oor die NS(B)-kurrikulum en die doelwitte daarvan. Hierdie faktore lê ten grondslag van die ontevredenheid tussen belanghebbendes met betrekking tot indiensneembaarheid.

Kernwoorde: Indiensneembaarheid; NS(B)-afgestudeerdes; beroepsonderwys

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CA	–	Capability Approach
CPD	–	Continuing Professional Development
CV	–	Curriculum Vitae
DHET	–	Department of Higher Education and Training
FET	–	Further Education and Training
HCT	–	Human Capital Theory
NATED	–	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma
NC(V)	–	National Certificate (Vocational)
NGO	–	Non-governmental Organisation
NQF	–	National Qualifications Framework
NSC	–	National Senior Certificate
NSFAS	–	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NYDA	–	National Youth Development Agency
REQV	–	Relevant Education Qualifications Value
SETAs	–	Sector Education and Training Authorities
SIT	–	Social Identity Theory
SSS	–	Students Support Services
TVET	–	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
WBE	–	Work-based Exposure
WPO	–	Work Placement Officer

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OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1   Introduction

Limited employability opportunities give rise to negative attitudes to education (Cieslik & Simpson, 2006). Yorke (2001) and Knight and Yorke (2002) categorised the concept of employability as being equipped for the job and capable of being employed; and the ability of graduates for finding a job – any job. Employability furthermore refers to a set of achievements that include skills, understanding and personal attributes that make graduates employable and enable them to be successful in their chosen occupations and to the benefit of the workforce, community and the economy at large (Yorke, 2006).

The National Certificate (Vocational) (NC(V)) programme was introduced in 2007 in South African Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, but it does not seem to have attracted interest from school leavers, businesses and the public at large due to a lack of articulation and links to employability (Umalusi, 2009). Taylor, Servage and Hamm (2014) highlight that students choose to follow academic education rather than vocational education due to factors that include the impossibility of being accredited for the National Senior Certificate (NSC) qualification, forcing students to start at NC(V) level 2.[1] In addition, the low national throughput rate of 4% as recorded in 2009, and 34% in 2014 (a substantial improvement but not meeting the average national target of 57%) translates into a high failure rate, a low graduation rate, and high dropout rate (at around 6%) (DHET, 2015). These factors add to possible negative public perceptions about the NC(V) programme.

Johnes (2006) holds that graduates who have studied a particular course and obtained their qualifications have improved possibilities of employment. Walters (2004) found that postsecondary qualifications enhance employment opportunities for the beginner worker, with 99% of students who obtained first degrees in 2006/2007 getting employed within six months of completing their degrees in the particular study (Lowden, Hall, Elliot & Lewin, 2011). The same cannot be said of NC(V) graduates. The NC(V) curriculum is pitched at a lower

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[1] The National Certificate (Vocational) (NC(V)) has three levels (L2, 3 and 4 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)), which is an alternative learning pathway to Grade 10, 11 and 12 of the academic schooling system (DHET, 2013). All the NQF levels 2, 3 and 4 consist of three fundamental subjects that are English First Additional Language, Life Orientation and Mathematical Literacy or Mathematics, in addition to four vocational subjects. In order to be certificated at the exit L4, students must have satisfied the basic requirements of passing the seven subjects for each level and also the compulsory Integrated Summative Assessment Tasks (ISAT) which constitute a practical component of the vocational subjects.

qualification level than postsecondary education. NC(V) graduates have not yet acquired a postsecondary qualification since the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) exit level 4 is merely equivalent to Grade 12 at secondary school level, and as such these graduates may struggle to find full-time employment. The National Senior Certificate (NSC) or Grade 12 students have not proven to have an edge of employability over their counterparts, the NC(V) graduates. Spaull (2013) notes that about 25% of NSC or Grade 12 students, ranging between 18 and 24 years of age and of whom 90% of were black, were unemployed. Recent records have shown that TVET colleges and education and training authorities do not have systems in place to track NC(V) graduate progression into employment (HRDC, 2014). The fact that there is no analytical information showing NC(V) graduate employment history exposes an institutional weakness as well as a lack of institutional relations with their alumni.

Between 2012 and 2015, nearly 1 677 308 students successfully completed NSC or Grade 12 but most of those have not yet engaged in post-school education and are not employed (DoE, 2015). Each year, the schooling system supplies around 419 330 Grade 12 school leavers (DoE, 2015) but of those, only around 581 048 gain access to higher education, including TVET colleges. The remaining 274 065 students in the four consecutive years made up approximately 1 096 260 young people who could not be accommodated in the labour market or education system (DHET, 2013). The unemployment rate amongst the youth (between 15 and 24 years) in South Africa is nearly 51%, as classified under the concept 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) (StatsSA, 2014). A recent study labelled such unemployment and underemployment as one of the top 10 global risks (Roux, 2015). In light of this statement, a spate of attacks on foreign nationals and recent protests are examples of the risks emanating from a lack of employability as local protesters claimed a lack of economically viable options for employment (Nwadeyi, 2015:8).

Table 1.1 indicates how students filtered in and out of the TVET colleges in the period 2007–2013. As the public schools supply the TVET colleges with students, TVET colleges must account to areas of how the students are absorbed into the system and where they go after course completion.

Table 1.1: Drop-out and failure rate of NC(V) students (Gewer, 2010; DHET, 2012)

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Number of students enrolled	26 451	67 512	122 921	122 257	120 044	140 000	155 000
Number of students who wrote NC(V)					17 836	15 334	22 470
Number of students who passed L4					7 638	6 018	8 346
Drop-out/failure					115 283	116 239	111 698

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All the students who attended the NC(V) programmes in the year of its inception were expected to complete their L4 in 2009. Unfortunately, no statistical data indicating how many students passed L4 between 2007 and 2010 are available except records that show enrolment figures. Students who joined the TVET colleges in 2008 were expected to complete in 2010, while those who joined in 2009 were expected to complete in 2011. The DHET (2012) indicated the statistical data showing that only 7 638 students managed to complete L4 in 2011 and that accounted for a 6% pass rate, which means the 94% of students had either dropped out or were repeating levels within the TVET college system. In 2012, there were only 6 018 students who completed L4 and that accounted for 95% of students who either dropped out or got stuck within the TVET college system. The second last column in Table 1.1 shows that in 2013 only 8 346 students passed L4 and that accounted for 93% of students who either dropped out or got stuck within the TVET college system. These statistics point to the challenges within the NC(V) curriculum that warrant further research and interrogation.

The DHET Research Agenda (2014) also advocates for an increased participation in TVET colleges to reach enrolment targets as set by the Ministry of the DHET. The intake stood at 345 000 in 2010, and 650 000 in 2013, while targeting one million registrations by 2015 (DHET, 2013), but colleges only managed to enrol 725 000 (DHET, 2015). Sensible as it may sound, increasing enrolment targets stands in contrast to aspects of current throughput rates within the South African vocational education system and the employability of these graduates (Taylor, 2011). Only 6 018 out of 15 334 students wrote and passed the exit NC(V) L4 in 2011 (DHET, 2012). Although the number of students who wrote and completed NC(V) L4 in 2013 had increased, with 8 346 out of 22 470 passing, the average throughput rate dropped from 39% to 37% (DHET, 2015). Furthermore, future efforts to increase enrolment will be futile if employability of NC(V) graduates remains low, with at least 51% youth of ages between 20 and 24 years – nearly half the youth population in South Africa – being unemployed (Branson & Hofmeyr, 2015). Increased employability of NC(V) graduates may contribute to sustained economic participation and growth.

Under such difficult conditions of high unemployment, some NC(V) graduates return to the TVET colleges after completing their NC(V) qualification to do the 18-month NATED programme, which is combined with an extra 18 months of practical experience. The subsequent certificate obtained is converted into a diploma. The NATED programme consists of three courses: Public Management, Marketing Management, and Public Relations, while the NC(V) consists of Generic Management, Marketing Management, and Information Technology. As the researcher I needed to consider whether the courses as outlined above match the economic conditions of Dutywa Town where the study was conducted. Dutywa

Town is a deep rural town and underdeveloped in terms of infrastructure and transport. A mismatch does not parallel the vision and the mission of the college, that of being responsive to the social and economic needs as well as equipping the students with the essential skills to contribute to the development of rural communities. The mismatch may also build a strong foundation of risking losing graduates to other provinces or cities such as Gauteng/Johannesburg, and the Western Cape/Cape Town. My role was also to find out which programme is mostly preferred by the employers.

NC(V) graduate returnees to the college to enrol for the NATED programme may not have positive perceptions about the NC(V) programme, which may discourage other potential students from taking up the programme. Currently, it is not clear whether the NC(V) graduate returnees had reapplied under duress, through the advice of others, out of their own free will, or had observed more favourable work opportunities given to graduates with a diploma qualification.

Apart from the apparent stigma attached to vocational education in South Africa, it would seem the current NC(V) curriculum is not designed to offer apprenticeship possibilities that would provide appropriate theoretical training, practical skill development, and work experience (Taylor, 2011). NC(V) programmes do have integrated summative assessment tasks (ISATs), which constitute a practical component done simultaneously with the content subject and allocated during other periods. However, employers still prefer to recruit graduates who have gained workplace experience as they value experience more than formal credentials (Wolf, 2011). Employers furthermore view employability of graduates in terms of skills such as time management, self-discipline, and communication that may contribute to the success of the organisation (Harvey, 2002).

In order for graduates to become employable as outlined above, students need support from their lecturers. Unfortunately, some of the vocational lecturers who should impart the skills and attributes lack the theoretical background and professional expertise themselves, while others lack the practical component required in operationalising the NC(V) curriculum (Umalusi, 2009). Under such conditions lecturers may facilitate students' learning ineffectively as far as acquiring knowledge and skills are concerned. These conditions may further inhibit the ability of both lecturers and institutions to help students find employment, which would require of TVET colleges to become the initiators of partnerships with current and potential employers of graduates (Lowden et al., 2011). Such partnerships (as suggested by Lowden et al., 2011) may assist lecturers in understanding what the needs and expectations are of current and potential employers. The national Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)

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Research Agenda (2014) emphasises the need to investigate what employability means within the South African vocational sector.

1.2   Rationale for the study

The NC(V) curriculum is aimed at developing skills as outlined by the National Skills Development Strategy III (DHET Research Agenda, 2014:9). However, South Africa is challenged by a shortage of skilled personnel with nearly 829 000 vacant posts waiting to be filled (Sharp, 2014) and a high rate of prevailing youth unemployment (Needham & Papier, 2011). The NC(V) curriculum was designed partly for addressing skills shortages caused by skilled worker migration to other developed nations. For example, nearly 4 out 10 final-year university students intended to leave South Africa for the USA, Australia, Europe and Canada (Reddy, 2006).[2] McGrath, Badroodien, Kraak and Unwin (2004) suggest that there is a need for South Africa to attempt keeping skilled individuals within its borders while at the same time increasing workplace learnerships. The DHET Research Agenda (2014) proposes arranged partnerships between government departments, education institutions, employer bodies, trade unions, industry and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) as an issue that warrants further investigation on the basis that the TVET colleges have a strong compulsory workplace learning component.

Government is expected to establish and encourage a stronger and more cooperative relationship between education and training institutions and the workplace (DHET, 2013) so that employers can give direction towards what is required by the industry. The TVET sector, in turn, must ensure that NC(V) graduates exit as employable. The NC(V) curriculum in its current form seemingly lacks the impetus to elicit recognition from employers; furthermore, employers do not appear to have confidence in the employability of NC(V) graduates. A change in the attitude of employers towards the NC(V) curriculum, NC(V) graduates' choice of marketable careers, a passion for work, and accountability may thus add value to the employability of NC(V) graduates. Interest in employability of NC(V) graduates in practical terms may also bring relief to individuals, communities, social or public institutions and the government in that a successful nation is one that offers its citizens employment opportunities.

The employability of students graduating with an NC(V) within the TVET sector has not been well documented. Information regarding how students are placed in jobs after completion of their vocational studies is not readily or publicly available, nor how students and their lecturers, as well as their potential employers, perceive their opportunities for employment. Such a lack of information contributes to the existing negative perceptions about the employability of NC(V)

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graduates owing to their lack of skills and the complex mix of programmes and practical workplace experience needed by employers (DHET, 2013).

1.3   Problem statement

The Dutywa campus of the King Hintsa (TVET) College is not immune to the national challenges cited above. The King Hintsa TVET College is a merger of former Centane Technical College, Teko Technical College, H.B. Tsengwa Technical College and Idutywa Satellite, formerly known as Idutywa Community College. The college is situated in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The Dutywa campus is situated within the Mbhashe Local Municipality (see Figure 1.1 below). The map labelled Figure 1.1 below is of the South African map showing the Eastern Cape province where the study was conducted.

Figure 1.1: Positioning of the study site within the Eastern Cape province

The map labelled Figure 1.2 below is the Amathole District Municipality map showing where the study took place.
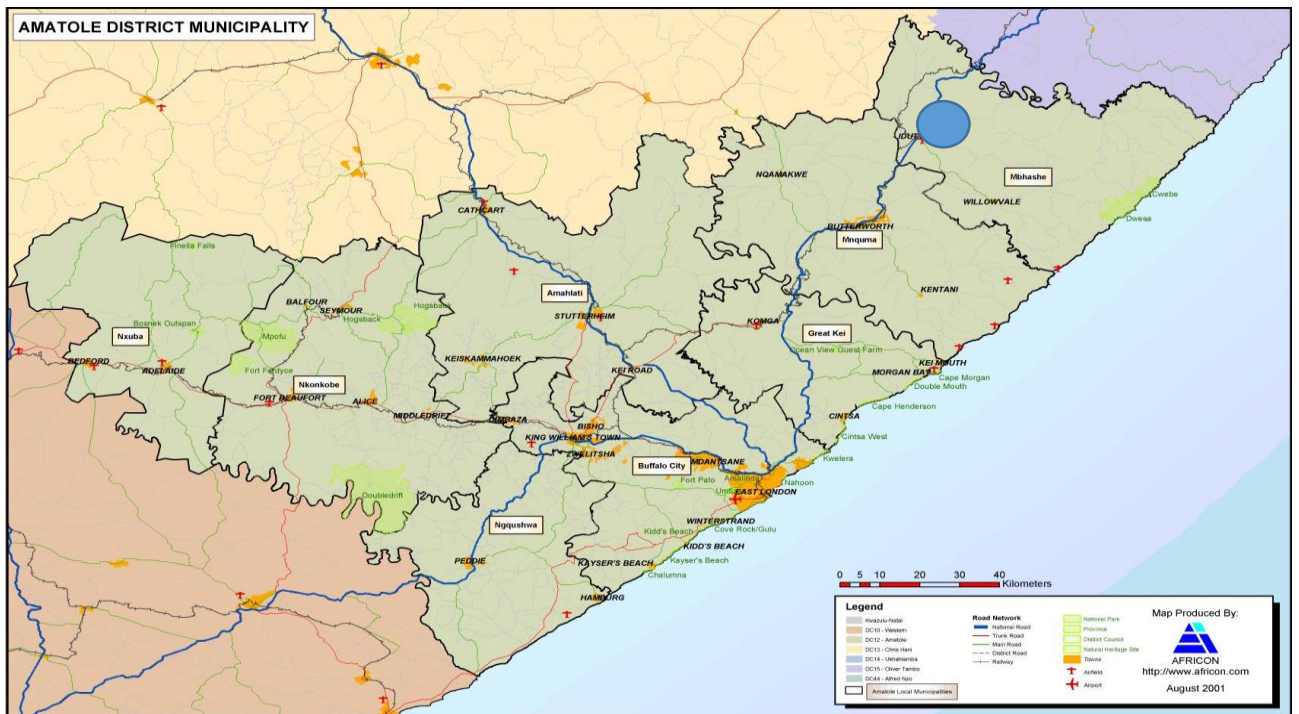
Figure 1.2: Positioning of the study site within Amathole District Municipality

The areal map labelled Figure 1.3 below is the Dutywa Town map in the Mbhashe Local Municipality showing where the study took place. The Dutywa campus is situated just less than 2 km east of Dutywa Town in the Willowvale Road.

Figure 1.3: Positioning of the study site within Dutywa Town

Statistics of the Dutywa campus show that in the 2013 and 2014 academic years, 73% of NC(V) graduates from the three programmes (Generic Management, Marketing, and Information Technology) out of the 15 students had not been employed, neither were they engaging in the work-based experience (WBE) programme, or internships. Thus only 27% of NC(V) graduates for this period were working. The percentage above culminates from the 15

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students who successfully completed the L4 NC(V) programmes, with 11 graduates not able to be absorbed into the local industry, while the other 4 graduates (3 having completed in 2013 and 1 in 2014) were able to be absorbed into the workforce. Of those graduates who could not find placement, 53% returned to various TVET colleges and private colleges to study further for future acquisition of a diploma qualification. Only 8 NC(V) graduates (53%) returned to the TVET college to register for the NATED programme.

The NATED programme paints a different picture in terms of absorption into the WBE or internship programmes. The majority (69%; n=11) of the graduates who completed N6 in the academic year 2013 had been absorbed into various government departments and the private sector. Only 31% (n=5) of the graduates could not find any placement opportunities to the WBE or internship programmes. The graduates who completed the N6 programme in 2014 were slightly less successful, with only 4 graduates (22%) who were absorbed into the WBE or internship programmes, while the remaining 14 graduates (78%) had not yet found employment. Therefore, the combination of the 2013 and 2014 academic years shows that NATED graduates seem to have greater employment opportunities with WBE or internships, with 44% of these graduates gaining employment in this manner (as opposed to the 27% of NC(V) graduates from the same college campus).

A new development on recent employment shows improvement on the trend of NC(V) graduates' employment. Duncan (2016) reflected the amount of NC(V) graduates, just about 42% who got work placement. This may not be the exact reflection of all NC(V) graduates since this could have focused on either NC(V) Business or Engineering Studies with other elements such demographic setting coming to play. The study conducted by Duncan (2016) may have summed up all the programmes registered under NC(V) while in this study, the focus was only in the three programmes found in the deep rural areas and outcomes of these settings will not be the same.

I investigated whether the courses as outlined above match the economic conditions of Dutywa Town. Dutywa Town is a rural town and underdeveloped in terms of infrastructure and transport with mostly light open trucks (commonly known as 'bakkies') used as the mode of transport.

1.4   Research questions

With these issues as background, the following main research question was developed:

How do stakeholders perceive the employability of NC(V) graduates from a Technical and Vocational Education and Training college?

Sub-questions that developed from this question were:

1. How do NC(V) graduates from three selected programmes (two Business Studies and one Engineering Studies) perceive their employment opportunities prior to their enrolment in a NATED programme?
2. How do lecturers in the selected programmes view their ability to promote the employability of NC(V) graduates?
3. How do the employment criteria of potential employers of NC(V) graduates align with the NC(V) graduate outcomes in selected programmes?

1.5 Definitions and concepts

Although various definitions of employability have been developed, there are key concepts that highlight certain elements embraced by employability, such as characteristics and qualities, and these two concepts extend to skills and attitude displayed by graduates in the real work environment. Employability refers to a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations – which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Yorke, 2006). Employability also refers to graduates' possession of a certain level of skills and attitude as well as their ability to utilise them for job searching and retention of the same job (Nabi, 2003). Employability thus refers to how graduates tend to display certain characteristics expected by employers, and that would be vital for the future functioning of their organisation (Harvey, 1997). Holmes (2001) listed certain characteristics to support how Harvey defined employability skills that graduates should possess, such as being proactive, a self-starter, confident and enthusiastic. Employability furthermore refers to having the qualities needed to maintain employment and progress in the workplace (Lees, 2002). Beyond individual skills, employability could also mean the socio-political connection to influential persons very close to employers who are likely to recommend the candidate's skills, personality and ability to work hard. Qualifications and all other attributes of employability play a lesser role in this set up. The middleman could be a close relative, a friend or a comrade who will speak highly about someone's achievements even if there is none.

1.6 Research design

The study was positioned within an interpretivist research paradigm as it allowed for individuals to socially construct meaning (Mack, 2010) and enabled me, as the researcher, to consider participants' subjective interpretations, and their views of the world as the basis to understand the studied phenomenon (Krauss, 2005). The studied phenomenon in this study relates to investigating how NC(V) graduates, lecturers and prospective employers' supervisory representatives perceive NC(V) graduates' employability. In the process of studying the above-mentioned perceptions, a dialogue existed between me (the researcher) and the various participants (Wahyuni, 2012) – also known as an emic perspective – because I studied the social reality through the views of the participants. In this study, NC(V) graduates, lecturers and potential employers of graduates from selected programmes at a particular college campus formed the main data sources.

1.7   Research methodology

A case study methodology was employed in this study. Stake (1995) defines case study as an investigation and analysis of a single or collective cases aimed at capturing the sophisticated nature of the study. Yin (2009) describes a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident. Yin's definition supports that of Stake in explaining that unclear boundaries between phenomenon and context create the complexity of the study. The rationale for using the case study methodology in this study included that research questions were framed in the form of 'why' or 'how' (Wahyuni, 2012).

Besides data collection emerging from multiple sources of evidence (as recommended by Yin, 2004), the study used multi-sites and multiple approaches to analyse the collected data without involving numerical ways of answering research questions (Wahyuni, 2012). NC(V) graduates from the identified programmes, the exit level 4 lecturers and a selection of prospective employers around Dutywa Town were asked to participate in the study.

Rowley (2002) states that case study research is focused on contemporary events when the relevant behaviour cannot be manipulated. The NC(V) programme is still in its formative years within vocational education; only eight years have passed since its inception. This strengthens the view that a case study methodology was suitable and applicable in this study in that the employability is a complex issue.

The flexibility that a case study methodology offers creates a space for data interpretation based on multiple sources of information (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In this study interviews were used

to obtain data which required that I framed my questions to suit the three categories of participants: students, lecturers, and potential employers' supervisory representatives. The study focused on the following courses: Generic Management, Information Technology and Marketing programmes at the Dutywa campus, King Hintsa TVET College. The interest of this inquiry revolved around employability of NC(V) graduates with special attention to how NC(V) graduates, lecturers and employers perceived employability. As stated by Flyvbjerg, the above statement highlights the real life context advocated by Yin (1994) as a necessary condition for case study research.

Critics of case study research point out the possible negative aspect of the researcher influencing the outcomes of the study based on his/her access and pre-understanding (Patton & Appelbaum, 2003). However, being close to the object of study enables the researcher to record first-hand what is happening (Gummesson, 1991) and as an active participant to understand participants' knowledge, insights and experiences (Gummesson, 1991). On both these aspects, my insider status as the researcher allowed for recording reactionary responses that enriched the data, which made relevant interpretations of participants' experiences possible.

The study took a cross-sectional approach where the data from the participants represent research activities at a particular point in time (Olsen & George, 2004). Furthermore, data were collected from the selected individuals in order to assist in answering the research questions of interest (Olsen & George, 2004), in this study pertaining to the perceptions of different stakeholders in terms of NC(V) graduates' employability. The participants were six NC(V) graduates (n=06) from the selected programmes, three NC(V) L4 lecturers (n=3) – one from each programme (including Generic Management, Marketing Management, and Information Technology) – and four employers' supervisory representatives (n=4) from the business and government sector (such as Spar and government institutions including the police station and health department and education departments where the Dutywa campus is situated). Their inclusion shed light on their perceptions on employability of NC(V) graduates who had graduated from selected programmes at the particular TVET college campus.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The conducting of interviews is defined as a method of collecting data with the interviewer asking or directing questions to the interviewee (Polit & Beck, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were chosen as this approach structures the interview, but at the same time allows the researcher to probe in order to obtain rich data (Robson, 2002). Semi-structured interviews are organised beforehand as questions

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are planned ahead of the interviews while probing questions develop during interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Graduation lists for all NC(V) and NATED graduates were used to identify students who had completed their studies and satisfied triangulation data collection method (Patton, 2002). The use of interviews and perusal of documents as the basic application of triangulation allowed me to avoid bias or distortion of a particular portion of reality being investigated (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Issues of collecting data using multiple sources do not divert from the objective of verifying and supporting the basis of inquiry. The use of triangulation in this study increased the opportunities of validating the findings (Stake, 1995).

1.8   Limitations and ethical concerns of the study

This study was not commissioned or by any means an instructional project from any institution, and therefore due to limited resources related to financial constraints, the study did not extend to NC(V) graduates who lived in the areas outside the Dutywa campus and/or Dutywa Town. Many other NC(V) graduates who returned to colleges far from Dutywa Campus could not be included in this study due to the distance and costly travels incurred by the researcher. Some NC(V) graduates returned to do Nated programmes at Buffalo City TVET College (East London Campus – nearly 150km from Dutywa Town) and others at Lovedale TVET College (King Williams Town Campus – 45km more than that of Buffalo City TVET College) which were costly distances for the researcher to include in the study.

Each campus of King Hintsa TVET College specializes with particular courses and Dutywa Campus specializes in the Information Technology, Marketing and Generic Management which is more inclined to Human Resource Management. Since Dutywa Town does not have Information Technology and Marketing Companies, it became difficult to find employer representatives who could provide background about their companies' employment criteria or attest to NC(V) graduates offered employment opportunities. Although Dutywa Town is deep rural, no amount of facts to claim that Information Technology and Marketing Companies cannot be established but currently the study faces the above limitation.

Bias could occur during the interviews as NC(V) graduates may have been tempted to sympathise with the researcher since there was a lecturer-student relationship which had the potential of compromising the true reflection of the findings, implications and conclusions. A session to brief all participants about the importance of being honest in their responses was aimed at minimising such bias.

Gate-keeping was another aspect which needed attention in that the external participants in the selected businesses seemed to be reluctant in releasing the supervisors of the new recruits as they feared that the study might expose poor application of labour policies. A session with business owners took place in order to dispel such misconceptions.

The context of this study binds the findings, implications and conclusions to the environment in which the study was conducted, meaning that the sister campuses to the Dutywa campus were not affected by such outcomes. It is suggested that similar research studies that would include the sister campuses may be conducted in order to compare/contrast, expand and strengthen the findings of this study.

Issues of ethics in any research study that involves human beings cannot be overlooked. As a researcher, working with human beings in a research project brings with it ethical constraints and risks. Researchers have a responsibility to minimise risks and ensure that research studies become a harmless exercise of finding the truth and knowledge. Klopper (2008) outlines ethical considerations as the protection of participants' rights, obtaining informed consent, and the institutional review process or ethical approval. According to Klopper (2008), such rights include the right to self-determination, the right to privacy, the right to autonomy and confidentiality, the right to fair treatment and the right to protection from discomfort and harm as well as informed consent to be obtained from participants, the research site and the relevant authorities. The American Anthropological Association (AAA, 2012) contributed to the discussion by indicating that researchers should adhere to the following guiding principles:

- They should do no harm. This means they should avoid harming the reputation, as well as the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of participants. Until such time risks are removed from the study, the study needs to be halted.

- They should be open and honest regarding the study. This involves being truthful about the purpose of study, implications of the study and the impact on other stakeholders. Failure to disclose the above ethical requirement is likely to result in disqualification of the study.

- They need to obtain informed consent and necessary permission – all participants and contributors to the study need to be briefed about the research objectives, the roles of participants, and the impact and outcomes of the study. To satisfy this aspect, I sought ethical clearance from Stellenbosch University to conduct the study, research number (SU-HSD-002615). Furthermore, I obtained permission from the DHET Eastern Cape

office and the King Hintsa TVET College principal to conduct the study. All participants in the study signed a consent form to show that they fully agreed to participate after understanding the information I gave them. No minor participants took part in this study as this would have required an extended procedure to consult and find permission from parents/guardians.

- The researcher should weigh competing ethical obligations of collaborators and affected parties – this includes identifying conflicting ideas and interest amongst participants to enable the researcher to take precise ethical decisions which would not jeopardise the study.

- They should make research results accessible – as much as access to research results is mandatory, this should not compromise the confidentiality principle. In the case of the current study, the results would be available to the relevant authorities and to the vocational institution where the study is situated and participants would probably be available on request.

- They must protect and preserve research records. In the current study this issue was given priority. Although the above-mentioned ethical issues were treated equally, the following received more attention due to weight of importance: as a way to secure confidential information and data received from participants, I used my personal laptop computer which cannot be used by any other person. The office I used was not shared with any other individual, meaning that in my absence the office would be locked and therefore on both occasions my research activities would be safely kept for the period of the research until submission. Records and data of the research will be preserved for 12 months after the release of research results, digital data deleted and paper data may be burnt.

- The researcher must maintain a respectful and ethical professional relationship – respect implies that the researcher should avoid exploitation of participants and other stakeholders. This also involves acknowledging contributions from other researchers and giving appropriate credit for such contributions including referencing where ideas of other authors have been used.

To ensure privacy of the data provided by participants, the data was de-identified (Berg, 1998) by using letters of the alphabet to represent participants from the population identified by the

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researcher. The following letters were used to identify participants in their responses: G – graduate; L – lecturer and S – supervisor. A researcher should make use of recurrent reading to familiarise himself with the data. This approach would assist the researcher in observing patterns, strange occurrences, irrelevancy or differences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, recurrent reading will increase the researcher's insight into the participants' experiences, followed by establishing categories of the experiences (Pillay et al., 2004). After all research protocols have been observed and ethical clearance obtained, the study can commence.

1.9   Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the study that is reported in this thesis. The national setting and challenges to NC(V) programmes as it pertains to employability were explored, which provided the backdrop and rationale to the study. The established situational questions regarding NC(V) graduates' prospects of employability formed the basis of the main research question and sub-questions that were provided in this chapter. An overview of the study and design followed. The rest of the thesis explores relevant literature (Chapter 2), provides an account of the research design and methodology (Chapter 3), reports and discusses the research results (Chapter 4), and concludes by answering the research questions and discussing possible implications of the study (Chapter 5).

CHAPTER 2

AN OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.1   Introduction

The United Nations (UN, 2001) suggests that all countries need to review, re-think and re-orient the education, vocational training and labour market policies to facilitate the school-to-work transition and to give young people a head start in working life. This chapter examines current debates related to employability, and how these debates are relevant to stakeholder perceptions about NC(V) graduates' employability locally. Attention will be given to the evolution of vocational education; institutional changes as drawn from the then technical colleges to FET colleges, and now TVET colleges; NATED programmes changing to Report 191, and their conceptualised formation thereof. The changes created a vacuum which McGrath and Akoojee (2009) interpreted as low quality and low status given the fact that employers, Government and the public had developed a negative perception of these vocational institutions. Oketch (2007) also holds the view that young adults choose academic education above vocational education on the basis that vocational education leads to unemployment, or underpaying work that is repetitive and boring. In the South African vocational context, the situation has been exacerbated by the introduction of the NC(V) programmes that, since the inception thereof, have never been monitored in terms of graduates' employability.

Historical events are also crucial in this discussion of employability since this aspect highlights how employability issues have been handled and have shaped the current context. The chapter therefore starts with a contextualised overview of the historical events that influenced the development of the TVET sector in South Africa and the employability of its graduates.

2.2   How history shaped TVET graduates' employability

Mbatha, Wildschut, Mncwango, Ngazimbi and Twalo (2014) highlight the manner in which laws were enacted to suppress job seekers, especially Africans. According to the Masters & Servants' Act of 1856, later amended to the Native Labour Regulations Act of 1911, the Apprenticeship, now commonly referred to as learnership, was initially born out of a form of slavery enacted under a system of racial inequality. Badroodien (2004) points out that job availability to vocational graduates after the abolition of slavery was based on racial lines, including job specifics. Such protectionist policies restricted black labour from improving their

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employability so as to provide a large supply of cheap labour that eventually created class and race conflict (Webster, 1994).

The National Apprenticeship Board was established with the mandate to design curricula for artisans and the purpose was to establish the National Trade Testing Board that would eventually train 22 417 artisans to solve the then Poor White problem beyond 1945 (Lundall, 1997). According to the Vocational Education Act of 1955 (VEA, 1955), the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1956 (ICA, 1956) and later the Labour Relations Act of 1956 (LRA, 1956) 37 600 whites were trained in the building industry, while only 560 blacks were trained in the same industry over the period of 10 years, that is from 1969–1979 (Lundall & Kimmie, 1992). These Apartheid-driven policies were eventually abolished as they only benefitted the white population to the detriment of the employability of the majority black population.

The post-1994 democratic dispensation came up with a series of economic, educational and skills development policies for the purpose of redressing the injustices of the past. According to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of 1994 (RDP, 1994), the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy of 1996 (GEAR, 1996), the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) of 2006 (ASGISA, 2006), and the National Developmental Plan (NDP) of 2011 (NDP, 2011) policies, government advocated for economic growth. However, it does not seem as if these policies have translated into increased employability of graduates from the vocational education sector.

Maree (2007) also noted that the policies stated in the section above seem to have yielded very little results and were left to dry on the shelves while an attempt to draft other policies were in due process. This was the reason for suggesting the six ways of improving employment, namely macro-economic growth, industrial restructuring, skills development, facilitating the informal economy, removing unnecessary constraints on small enterprises to become formal, and public works (Maree, 2007).

On the educational front, laws governing first the Department of Education (DoE) and later the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) were promulgated. According to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act of 1995 (SAQA, 1995), the Further Education and Training (FET) Act of 1998 (FET, 1998) and the Skills Development Act (SDA) of 1998 (SDA, 1998), these are relevant examples of policies that were introduced to promote skills development and the acquisition of qualifications from recognised public institutions with the aim of improving the employability of all, but particularly the previously marginalised black population of South Africa. Elliot (2009) indicated that there was a shortage of nearly 40 000

artisans and plans were afoot from Government that 50 000 artisans should be trained by 2010. However, training could only take place in the formal sector rather than in the informal sector that had grown extensively between 1996 and 2001 (Mbatha et al., 2014). As much as Government had good intent to improve employability, employment prospects declined in the mining, manufacturing and electricity sectors (Mbatha et al., 2014). The NC(V) programme does not seem to be closing the gap as intended at its inception.

Confusion and misunderstanding around the NC(V) curriculum divert aims and objectives and have hampered it in achieving its mandate. At the moment NC(V) graduates are unable to progress directly to NQF L5 although the NC(V) curriculum is seemingly aligned with the SAQA requirements. According to Sheppard and Sheppard (2012), NQF L4 means all the instructional offerings at a level of similar credits with Grade 12 or N3, while NQF L5 has similar credits with the first year after Grade 12. NC(V) graduates are by no means near completion of NQF L6, which – in terms of credits – amounts to the National Diploma after a combination of N4, N5, N6 (completed in 18 months) plus 18 months of experiential training without a break. The uncertainty of completing the NQF L6 within the region of six years creates the likelihood of confusing students, persons executing pedagogic instructions in class, employers and the public at large.

2.3   Conceptualising employability

Researchers have conceptualised employability to the extent of showing supporting and competing views to one another as set out below. Nauta, Van Vianen, Van der Heijden, Van Dam and Willemsen (2009) categorised employability definitions into three perspectives: a socio-economic perspective, an individual perspective, and an organisational perspective.

From a socio-economic perspective, Finn (2000) defined employability as the ability of different categories of the labour force to gain and maintain employment. Two distinctive characteristics of employability can be identified from this definition. To gain employment means to obtain initial employment with some employability skills used as the measuring stick, while maintaining employment implies to be employed for life or continuous and/or extended periods of employment. When one maintains, it means one services, plans, fixes, supports, changes, improves, and/or increases employability. All these phrases briefly relate to doing something to change towards a more marketable set of skills. Thijssen, Van der Heijden and Rocco (2008) described and expanded the employability definition as a condition that should match supply and demand in bringing about success of the organisation. Academic institutions are the suppliers who should market and sell their products (graduates) to the employers who

probably require the employable graduates. The NC(V) graduates have not proven their success in either of the two concepts: gaining and maintaining employment that would help them to contribute to the economy.

In an individual perspective, employability refers to adaptability (Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004), mobility (Van Dam, 2005), career development (Sterns & Dorsett, 1994), occupational expertise (van der Heijde & van der Heijden, 2006), and personal development and lifelong learning (Bezuijen, 2005; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007), which implies that individuals that fit this definition are already employed. Most of the concepts speak to the ability of individual workers to be flexible in performing extra duties, which may not necessarily be within their scope of work. If such self-capacitation could be done, coupled with academic improvements, such individuals would be successful in receiving promotions and better salaries. Once again, the NC(V) graduates are less fortunate because they have not acquired similar experience as mentioned above.

From an organisational perspective, employability has been defined as an aspect that relates to organisations' functional flexibility (Nauta et al., 2009). In this context, flexibility means the ability to change from one work station to the next and one task to the next, in what can be termed a 'rotational duty schedule'. At this level, employers are quite certain that work cannot stall because one operator of a particular machine is absent from work, or an office cannot function because another officer is not at work. Where NC(V) graduates were found to be working, all the above suggestions would be practically relevant.

All three perspectives combined give rise to the introduction of the functionalist perspective. This is based on the work of Durkheim (1984) regarding the division of labour. The objective of the functionalist perspective was to focus on how education could contribute to the stability or maintain the state of balance within society as a whole (Mooney, Knox & Schacht, 2007). Society in this case refers to the institutions designed to serve a variety of needs that eventually structure the society, such as family, academic institutions, economics, politics, religion, amongst others, to its current form (Mooney et al., 2007). In this study, employability is defined in relation to the functionalist perspective, as it involves employment institutions, academic institutions and graduates (in particular the NC(V) graduates). These institutions depend on one another to survive. Institutions that provide employment need graduates from academic institutions that can do the job, while graduates need academic institutions that will prepare them for consideration by employment institutions. Therefore, it is equally important to internalise fully how these institutions function. Since different aspects of how institutions function lead to either a positive or a negative impact involving choices, it is important to

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consider why NC(V) graduates have chosen to enrol in the NC(V) programme, what the needs of employers and the employment sector are, and how the pedagogic facilitators prepare the graduates for life after completion of their formal studies.

The following diagram (Figure 2.1) shows the existing relations surrounding employability. At the centre of this triangular relationship is the concept employability. On the base of the triangle are the students and lecturers, both joined at the bottom of the triangle by a horizontal line which shows the level and position at which they operate in order to feed the concept 'employability'. The position of the employer is at the top, joined by the two diagonal lines from the bottom positions of lecturers and students, implying that students and lecturers need to be somehow connected to the employer if they have to fulfil employability adequately.

Employers

Employability

Students   Lecturers
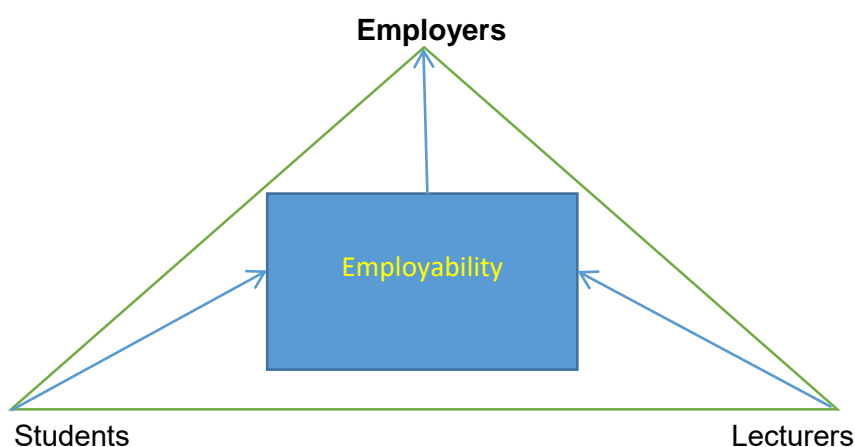
Figure 2.1: The triangular relationship of employability

Archer and Davison (2008) painted a contrasting view of what is taught in the higher institution and what the industry needs to arrive at employability level. The position of the employer in the triangle shows the power he possesses (indicated in bold type), including how he regulates who gets the job, weighs up salaries, and lays down the ground rules as well as requirements for securing any job within his control. Efforts to improve NC(V) graduates' employability are easily thwarted if employers recruit persons with higher qualification levels (for example, NQF levels 5 and 6 for retail banking and levels 6 and 7 for investment banking (Papier, McBride, Daniel & Prinsloo, 2012), while the maximum or exit level for NC(V) graduates is the NQF L4. Unfortunately, at present, the TVET colleges are not in the position to offer programmes beyond L4 in NC(V).

2.4   The importance of employability

In this study, employability is examined through the perceptions of educational stakeholders. Lowden et al. (2011) emphasised aspects that would ensure that a graduate would be employable:

- The importance of placements and recognising experiential learning is highlighted as the placement of NC(V) graduates needs to be initiated and accelerated as matter of urgency. Gewer (2009) notes that there is a link between experiential training in the form of placement, and that eventually leads to employment. Furthermore, Gewer (2009) claims that TVET colleges are not the appropriate platform to assist graduates for placement. For the NC(V) graduates, it means they have to spend another 18–24 months engaging in placement programmes. The question of how often one comes across NC(V) graduates who have been placed at some business or industry was addressed during the data collection process.

- This should be born in mind, only Marketing Management, Generic Management and Information Technology courses are offered in the NC(V) programme where the study was conducted, thereby limiting the NC(V) graduates' job search. As a result of various limitations the NC(V) graduates find themselves in inflexible and undesirable situations where they do not have alternative choices. Furthermore, they experience narrowed need requirements of the surrounding employment sector.

- The inclusion of employers in different committees of HEIs and allowing them to participate meaningfully are important aspects. Harvey, Locke and Morey (2002) who fully support the view that employer input into course content and project work could be helpful in promoting graduates' employability. Although employer participation seems to be a noble idea, it may succumb to the complexity of the education system since it is made up of the DHET as the custodian of academic matters, while teaching and learning at campus level where the NC(V) curriculum is followed has a middleman between itself and the DHET. This middleman is the administration centre of the college. Therefore, it is often not clear whether employers have to work directly with the DHET or with the administration centre of the college or the campus.

- A recognised qualification from a reputable institution is an important factor, yet Yorke and Knight (2006) caution that such a qualification does not guarantee graduates employment. As NC(V) graduates' highest L4 qualifications are equivalent to only a Grade 12 school qualification, and TVET colleges have seemingly a low attributed

status within South Africa, this aspect of employability might be troublesome for NC(V) graduates.

The poor placement and experiential learning, lack of course variety, lack of employer participation and unrecognised reputable institution observed in the little success of NC(V) graduates weighs less against what other theories aspire to achieve. A noteworthy theory in this respect is the human capital theory (HCT). The ability to improve employability gives the HCT unmatched support with regard to NC(V) graduates' overall objectives. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines human capital as the knowledge, skills and competencies embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being (OECD, 2001). Personal, social and economic well-being involve the ability to earn a salary, spend and pay tax, contribute to society by making available resources, acceptable behaviour, and the creation of improved self-image and desirable upward movement of life's goals. The absence of NC(V) graduates' employability diverts the purpose of what TVET colleges were designed for, that is closing the skills gap in South Africa and also providing human capital as required by the industry (Tikly, 2013).

Placement of NC(V) graduates has also been stressed and recommended strongly as a pathway towards the initial employment. However, work-based experience (WBE) or internships could be integrated into the learning environment and could greatly assist the NC(V) graduates. The WBE or internships would enable graduates to become used to the work environment relatively quickly. Dearing (1997) supported this view by suggesting that work experience be made available to a large number of graduates in the form of structured weekend placements; winter and summer holidays (DFES, 2002). Lack of training, even the initial training of NC(V) graduates in the work industry, reduces realisation of sustainable development and widens negative equity.

In the event where placement opportunities are hard to come by, NC(V) would consider offering voluntary services without stipends or monetary returns. Although volunteerism could be an easy route towards receiving training and initial employment, graduates seem to view it as a tool for exploitation (NFVF, 2014). It was found that during voluntary service, some graduates were instilled with a 'coffee boy' mentality and felt that they could only succeed and survive by working for someone (NFVF, 2014). Unfortunately, as much as graduates would wish to work independently, they would still bow down to what they called a 'film industry' dominated by white males since the latter possess the financial muscle to run the industry (NFVF, 2014).

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Volunteerism is also deeply rooted within the curriculum in the form of extra-curricular activities. Graduates who participate in committees or other extra-curricular activities in their communities or institutions of work are mostly preferred. This aspect causes employers to view such graduates as contributors suitable for the working community through active participation and initiative in taking on a variety of roles (Lowden et al., 2011). Employers find interest in recruiting and employing graduates who will competently and effectively execute tasks in a more desirable way (Holmes, 2001). Being competent and effective relates to the ability to produce the required results on allocated duties (performance), completing the duties within specified time-frames (effectiveness), being precise in terms of work done (efficiency), and contributing to work of others (team-work). For such graduates, work means completion of a task, fixing what was damaged, or achieving satisfying results. These desirable graduates hold a pragmatist view. Every vivid, detailed contribution made in the process to bring forth the results translates into desired benefits for both the employers and the employee.

Whether through participating in the placement or volunteering, experience is what NC(V) graduates urgently need. Graduates' ability to reflect on their experience, make connections with role players in the employment sector and tell the employers their story creates new hope. Yorke (2006) extended the concept of employability from the basic level by highlighting the age of 21 or 22 as the defining moment of employability. At this stage, when employers absorb these graduates, strict measures in terms of experience and the rest of the employability skills should not be fully applicable or considered highly. Employees who apply for a supervisory post are also clustered within the category of employability but with additional responsibilities or new roles. At that promotional level, knowledge and employability skills would be applied strictly in selecting the best candidate. Even if graduates or long-standing employees may be applying for a new position, issues relating to the applicants' capability influence their employability. Capability implies that the individual has knowledge of content, is skilful in the execution of duties and in prioritising decisions, is efficient, and is able to meet deadlines.

From a theoretical perspective capability is approached and defined differently to what it is generally known. Clark (2006) concurred with Amartya Sen that the capability approach (CA) focuses its attention on poverty (meeting basic living conditions), inequality (no segregation in all spheres of life, e.g. employment and salaries, amongst others) and human development (educational achievement, easier movement and access to socio-economic setting). Beyond measures of the standard economic frameworks, it is concerned with the well-being (healthier life) of citizens.

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Clark (2002) further emphasises the aspects that contribute to complete well-being; this is the practical side of survival and development in poor countries, mental functioning and recreational activities. When the NC(V) graduate's capability does not reflect skills and knowledge as mentioned above, the CA will not achieve its objective. The well-being of citizens can only be nurtured if the country's economic structures are well placed through policy reform to gear up for the purpose of poverty alleviation, lessen inequalities, and speed up human development. Policy reform should inform employers within the private sector and government on ways to improve the employability of NC(V) graduates.

2.5   Benefits of employability

Employability benefits happen in a two-way format that involves the employer (as the provider of work) and the employee (as the doer of the job and salary recipient). On employing someone, employers indicate the probability that the prospective employee has satisfied the criteria, knowledge and skills, certain attributes and experience set by the company or organisation. Newly employed graduates bring into the company or organisation fresh ideas and innovative thinking and working programmes (Garwe, 2014). Salaries that graduates receive in return may lift them from poverty-stricken status into the social and economic mainstream (McGrath & Akoojee, 2009).

Employability may furthermore contribute to the alleviation of poverty and related social ills. Forstater (2007) argues that employment enhances both individual and community well-being in that it not only contributes to economic production, but provides financial security, higher living standards, increased spending, and recognition for those employed. Furthermore, employment is key to good physical and mental health and through community benefits provides support to entire communities, including children (who can then attend school) and the elderly. As such, employment is also vital to overcoming poverty, and reducing inequalities and racial and ethnic tensions, and it leads to a decrease in the incidence of crime. Employment thus improves living conditions and promotes further investment in communities.

Yet no matter how one's employment is maintained, expertise or competence within a certain field is the key to guaranteeing one's employability. Expertise and competence stem from the result of the training and development programme instituted by an organisation's human resource development office. The human resource development policy should seek to develop and maintain a learning environment for employees in order to broaden organisational knowledge and competitive ability (Greengard, 2000). In turn, such learning environments suggest to employees that the organisation is taking good care of them (Allen, Shore &

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Griffeth, 2003). Outcomes with regard to the above are twofold: (1) organisational benefits – cumulative market growth; organisational performance and employee retention; and (2) employee benefits – career competencies; employee satisfaction and employee performance (Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2013).

Powell (2012) adds the view that if students gain employment and speak highly of their experience of the TVET college, that would not necessarily suggest that they are diligent but rather that it is a sign of having been privileged, an endeavour to garner appreciation and respect. Employability of graduates, with special reference to NC(V) graduates, brings hope to those who are still continuing with the NC(V) programmes. Whether on placement, internship, apprenticeship or learnership, these NC(V) graduates obtain relevant experience required by the industry, which places them at a recognisable position.

2.6   Concerns surrounding graduates' employability

Employers invest many resources (both in terms of monetary and human inputs) into newly appointed staff. It is thus not surprising that they want such new staff members to provide a return on investment by being well suited to the positions in which they are appointed. Employers' concerns about employability may intensify when such appointees are newly graduated and lack extensive prior work experience. Hillage and Pollard (1998) suggest that graduates should exploit their assets, in marketing and selling themselves to prospective employers. Lowden et al. (2011) point out that graduates need a variety of attributes and skills to

- become strong communicators – both written and oral,
- be able to work using their own initiatives,
- be capable of working independently,
- demonstrate taking responsibility,
- be creative and able to solve problems,
- manage time efficiently,
- have presentation skills,
- work as part of a team,
- be able to network, and
- be motivated and enthusiastic.

However, Cryer (1997) found that graduates tended to undersell themselves to prospective employers. Until such a period that NC(V) graduates are given an opportunity to prove their

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worth, speculations and perceptions around their employability may remain suspect. Smith, McKnight and Naylor (2000) observed that graduates from poor backgrounds were unable to find employment in their occupations after graduation. Wang (2013) concurs that exclusion, inequality and deprivation manifest in a system and lower the development of employability. It is not yet known why the NC(V) graduates' employability is less than optimal, but it is believed that their socio-economic status might be a contributing factor. Branson & Hofmeyr (2015) conceded that students join TVET colleges on the basis that the TVET colleges provide an unconditional bursary scheme (the NSFAS scheme that supports poor students). There is not enough evidence to support the view that graduates undersell themselves because of their poor background, whether in terms of the academic, financial or communication aspects.

Brown and Hesketh (2004) reject the notion that employability depends solely on one's ability to fulfil certain job requirements. Instead they posit that graduates compete amongst themselves. In this case, competition for employment emerges as an external factor, subjective and contextual (Imeokparia & Ediagbonya, 2012). McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) list external factors that may inhibit employment opportunities as follows:

- employers' attitudes;
- supply and quality of training and education;
- the availability of other assistance for disadvantaged job seekers;
- the extent to which the tax-benefits system successfully eliminates benefit traps; and
- the supply of appropriate jobs in the local economy.

For a graduate to secure employment amidst such uncertainty, the particular graduate needs to be smart and outstanding during interviews. Some external factors may be beyond graduates' control, including a financial crisis during a global economic downturn, and retrenchment and over-supply of graduates where only a few vacancies are available (Imeokparia & Ediagbonya, 2012). Such situations give rise to two types of job seekers: the purists, who are loyal job seekers who play by the book and meet all the necessary requirements, and the players, who go out of their way to get the job regardless of the requirements and in this case graduates' job-searching skills are tested (Imeokparia & Ediagbonya, 2012).

There is also a growing public perception that the responsibility for the lack of employability rests on the shoulders of vocational institutions, schools or even universities (Odora & Naong, 2013). The case in point, as indicated before, is the Dutywa campus that offers Generic Management, Information Technology and Marketing in the NC(V) programme, but the

question is whether these programmes respond to the socio-economic setting of the Mbhashe Local Municipality. Currently there seems to be what Odora and Naong (2013) term a mismatch between the education deliverables and socio-economic needs of the local business and municipality that lead to frustrations and disillusionment among the youth.

In addition, employers allege that educational institutions are unable to develop graduates' employability skills sufficiently (Peddle, 2000). Employers are interested in making a profit, meaning that when they hire an individual employee, they require immediate results regarding work efficiency from that employee, which is not always feasible. Therefore, employers would mostly prefer to hire an experienced, knowledgeable and skilful employee because there are limited resources to train employees. Within Dutywa Town the banking sector serves as an example (see Papier, McBride, Daniel & Prinsloo, 2012). Although claims of insufficient development of graduates' employability skills seem genuine, ways to evaluate the claims may be impractical. The reality is that most or all of the employability skills advocated by researchers at the level of higher education are simply simulated within the NC(V) curriculum. The NQF L2–L4 in TVET colleges (an equivalent of the FET phase (Grades 10–12) in high schools) should display distinguishable qualities of specialities in their learning areas and courses in order to separate them from their counterparts. The inclusion of practical periods could make the difference, but currently the required 22.5 minimum contact hours with students makes this difficult to implement.

By virtue of their position, values, location and ultimate objectives, TVET colleges are supposed to provide vocationally oriented education and training but there seems to be no regulatory means to engage stakeholders towards practical experience in the field of work (Akoojee, Gewer & McGrath, 2005). In considering the number of years spent towards completion of the NC(V) programme, it could be expected that skilled artisans would be produced while in reality it is largely unskilled, unproductive and unemployable graduates (Roopnarain, 2015). As to who should account for up-skilling the NC(V) graduates so that they become employable it is not clear whether it should be employers, lecturers and/or the graduates themselves. Roopnarain (2015) points out that the NC(V) curriculum has been pitched too high (with the three fundamental and four vocational subjects in a particular course), which makes it extremely difficult for students who have only completed Grade 9. Most of them are compelled to drop out in their first year or fail at L2 because they cannot cope. This aspect leaves little space for practical activities within the provided periods allocated for each subject.

Du Plessis (2012:08) reported that the TVET colleges have an entrenched poor public image with employers and this could be translated to few employment opportunities for graduates from TVET colleges in general and NC(V) graduates in particular. Dlamini (2014) found that students are seemingly taught what to do as opposed to how to execute what has been taught. Advocacy of the vision, mission and values of TVET colleges needs to be prioritised, and employers should be encouraged to express their needs especially with regard to the kind of graduates they expect. However, this cannot be achieved if negative views persist that vocational education is a suitable pathway for low academic achievers and school dropouts who wish to join the workforce (Hiebert & Borgen, 2002).

Amidst the ongoing economic unpredictability, these graduates are left stranded with the wrong skills which, according to McQuaid (2006), create little mobility and lead to a skills mismatch problem. NC(V) graduates might be baffled and overwhelmed by their lack of understanding the social space, which includes limited mental maps of job search (Green, Shuttleworth & Lavery, 2005). One may ask how willing and determined NC(V) graduates are to relocate or travel long distances in search of employment. Most TVET college students, as observed in the area where the study was conducted, come from poor backgrounds. They find it difficult or are reluctant to travel because of poor public transport links and lack of access to private transport; consequently, they miss valuable employment opportunities (Green et al. 2005; McQuaid, Green & Danson, 2005). In order to promote employability success, graduates need assistance in this regard but it is doubtful if TVET colleges have relevant policies in place to promote employment accessibility.

Employers' attitudes and conduct were also found to hamper the employability agenda. McGrath et al. (2010) reported that there was widespread reluctance amongst employers to take in 15–17 year old students for their work placement experience. It is furthermore noteworthy that the NC(V) programme admits students in this age range but some employers refuse to employ them because of their youth. It is suggested that both the government and TVET colleges ought to make a great effort in counteracting this kind of attitude and conduct.

The above-mentioned concerns need to be addressed and one way of dealing with them is by looking for better strategies. The following section addresses employability concerns by suggesting and discussing some established strategies.

2.7   Strategies to improve employability

Concern about employability is not a new phenomenon. Literature from across the world suggests a variety of strategies that may improve graduates' employability. Some of these strategies, namely identifying employability stakeholders, incorporating technology into the NC(V) curriculum, establishing volunteerism, and encouraging self-employment, are discussed in more detail below.

2.7.1 Identifying employability stakeholders

The term 'employability stakeholders' refers to every individual person as well as corporate and educational institutions that create the ability for graduates to be employable and/or establish work opportunities. These people and institutions need to support the students by providing knowledge, developing skills, attributes, reflective dispositions and assisting in creating the identity that graduates need to succeed in their prospective workplace (Holmes, 2013). Every employability activity and success will be determined by the role of each stakeholder.

Developing graduates' potential

Negative elements that would make employability prospects of the NC(V) graduates extremely difficult were identified by Du Plessis (2012: 08) in a South African newspaper article. Papier et al. (2012) made similar observations highlighting that the NC(V) graduates from the studied public TVET colleges lacked professionalism needed by the employers; were of poorer quality than the graduates from the private colleges studied; lacked independence; lacked passion for their profession which was aggravated by the display of negative attitudes; and were just generally not employable. This observation emphasised the challenges experienced in the TVET colleges not only on the side of the students but also by the systems in terms of teaching and learning, management and expected outcomes, as well as exposure to the job market.

It is suggested that to nurture graduates' employability, their skills should become the responsibility of all education stakeholders. In defining employability and discussing this issue, McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) suggest that graduates should concentrate on three sets of employment factors: (1) individual factors (employability skills and attributes, demographics, health and well-being, and job-seeking skills, adaptability and mobility); (2) personal circumstances (household circumstances, work culture, access to resources); and (3) external factors (demand factors and enabling support factors). These factors relate to how graduates can contribute to creating their own employment opportunities.

According to Savickas (2013) and Duffy (2010), career adaptability involves attitudes, competencies and behaviour that help graduates through job searching leading to career

changes, different work environments and a variety of work positions. As a concept, career adaptability also includes the four C dimensions that concern the future, who controls the future, where curiosity will place graduates in the future, and whether they are confidently ready for the future (Savickas, 2013). NC(V) graduates who returned to re-enrol in the NATED programmes look set to redress their situation by taking action to address the four C dimensions. Likely or random questions that occupy the graduates' minds are whether the NC(V) L4 certificate will enable them to find jobs (concern); whether employers are geared up and ready to employ NC(V) graduates (control); whether NC(V) graduates are ready to learn new skills apart from those acquired through subject content delivery (curiosity); and whether NC(V) graduates are able to communicate, make convincing presentations and/or even able to work on their image that would be presentable in front of employers (confidence) (Savickas, 2013). The first and the third Cs express doubts held by NC(V) graduates while the second C shows the powers employers have over who to employ or not. The last and fourth C tests whether teaching and learning include working out means to build students' confidence.

Graduates have to choose programmes and related subjects that will help them to be absorbed easily into the industry (NFVF, 2014). The choice of subjects must fit with the business in the region or towns where the institution is settled. This will make it possible for graduates to engage in afternoon and weekend part-time jobs. In their lesson presentations, lecturers need to emphasise to students that when they resume their duties, they must be willing and able to learn and to perform new tasks, take on different roles and be easily redeployed in flexible new workplaces (Bond & Garrick, 2001). These conditions form the basis and contribute to the establishment of knowledge workers (Cormican & O'Sullivan, 2003). In their findings, Rothwell, Herbert and Rothwell (2008) emphasise that subject choice had been an influential factor in the employability of graduates and therefore they propose that graduates' choice of subjects should align with the local job industries.

It remains to be seen whether NC(V) graduates have chosen the NC(V) programme under duress (control), or whether they chose the programme with the aim of exploring (curiosity), or whether they understood the need to achieve academically (confidence). Social identity theory (SIT) will serve as reference point for the aspect of choices. SIT is a theory of group membership (choose to belong) and behaviour (choose to act in a particular way) (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). In view of the above, SIT seems to involve conclusion on the sense of belonging and emotional reaction in the environment of choice and all based on attitude. Based on the discussion above, the study intended to explore employability attitudes of stakeholders (including employers, lecturers and NC(V) graduates themselves) towards NC(V) graduates and the NC(V) curriculum in terms of reaction.

The SIT has four categories enthusiasm, acceptance, ambivalence and resistance as its main source. These categories are briefly explained below.

Enthusiasm

In this aspect, people energized by different experiences or events (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002). Students draw inspiration to join vocational studies based on intrinsic motivation (students' own willingness and interest to follow vocational education) and extrinsic motivation (students observe role models within a particular field and choose to follow in the role model's footsteps). This aspect assists in understanding what made the NC(V) students join the vocational institution or a particular campus.

Acceptance

Stets & Burke (2000) add that the SIT works on salience through which a particular identity is activated as a function of the interaction between the characteristics of the perceiver and the situation. Before joining the vocational institution, students have observed that their academic performance in high school is poor, not warranting university entrance, and now resort to taking up vocational studies. These students tend to enjoy practical lessons more than the content subject lessons.

Ambivalence

The case of ambivalence prevails in situations where individuals' cognitive response to proposed change is in conflict with emotional response to the proposal (Piderit, 2000). It is understood that the students lack interest in vocational studies and programmes offered. Generally, students' performance is poor as opposed to social aspects that are high on the list of college life. Most probably, the 6% drop-out rate recorded in Chapter 1 might include this group of students since their poor performance may lead to their giving up their studies due to repeating levels or non-academic progress.

Resistance

Resistance is symbolic of cognitive state, emotional state and partly behaviour (Piderit, 2000). What happens is that generally, students in this category have failed at high school and lack interest in vocational studies. These students are often problematic, displaying negative behaviour and conduct as well as run-ins with the authority or security agencies.

In the light of the SIT discussed above, the focus and attention in this study was mainly on students' attitude towards vocational education. Graduates' completion of their studies forms

the basis of employability. This becomes a milestone of observing the attitude of students before joining the vocational institutions and after completion of the L4 or NC(V) graduates.

López, Caballero and Lampón (2012) include students' capability in drawing up a curriculum vitae (CV), preparation of personal interviews, knowledge of languages, report writing and meeting attendance as part of improving graduates' employability. Graduates need to design CVs that suit a particular business or relevant job (Papier et al., 2012). This must be coupled with how well they can verbally make presentations of the same information contained in a CV, are knowledgeable regarding their strengths and weaknesses, and present themselves with composure and self-confidence. Connection and networking put graduates at an advantage in that they contact and speak to relevant people who could inform them if there were vacancies available, although NFVF (2014) argues that the emphasis on personal details should be balanced by graduates' skills and qualifications. However, personal attributes remain the most influential aspect that contributes to employability of students. Woods and West (2010) point out that personal attributes determine success, performance and career choices although the path towards such success may be a long–term one. In the event that NC(V) graduates cannot gain access to initial employment, the long-term nature of success worsens the employability scenario. Woods and West (2010) suggest that graduates need to improve on their personality characteristics, which include being reliable and dependable, the ability to work under pressure, and being creative and enthusiastic. These personality characteristics allow graduates to develop trustworthiness, commitment to their jobs and the ability to be innovative.

Improving lecturer attitudes

Employability does not only depend upon the graduates themselves, but also on the education they receive prior to employment. Lecturers play a key role in preparing students for employability. Hall, Altman, Nkomo, Peltzer and Zuma (2005) single out negative attitudes of educators who have low morale and high stress levels as a key element in eventual student success. The DoE (2003b) demands that lecturers be qualified, competent, dedicated and caring. Lecturers have to create a positive classroom environment and failure to maintain good conduct in class takes away students' motivation to acquire knowledge and skills.

Certain abnormalities within work environments cannot be condoned and should not be practised. Papier et al. (2012) reported negatively on the scope of TVET lecturers' conduct coupled with irrelevant experience, poor discipline and low morale. The aspects referred to above highlight the seriousness of how the futures of the youth in the TVET colleges are jeopardised. Lecturers need to make sure that they have up–to-date knowledge, use relevant

subject content and align their teaching and learning activities to what works in the industry (Horn, 2006). Graduates work and perform better under conditions where they have practised, mastered and internalised the knowledge provided by lecturers. Graduates trust their lecturers, the suppliers of knowledge content that see them through their grades and courses of study.

In their lesson presentation lecturers might run the risk of paying more attention to subject content knowledge that helps students to pass tests and examinations. Miclea (2004) includes loyalty, honesty, responsibility, decision-making, problem-solving, dedication and written communication skills as part of the skills that lecturers should instil in graduates. Lecturers should teach graduates about honesty, loyalty and dedication as potential employers can do background checks with referees submitted on the application.

Besides the traditional perception that lecturers are knowledge providers, Robinson (2000) emphasises that educators should teach employability skills in a democratic approach that may enhance graduates' awareness of the values, attitudes, and worker accountability that underscore employability. People normally strive to deliver better when they contribute in any activity that enhances an organisation's progress, whether mentally or physically, because it creates a sense of pride within them. Lecturers need to assume the role of a coach or facilitator, set good examples of desired behaviour, and ensure that instructions regarding employability skills are designed to arrive at the relevant goals and objectives (Robinson, 2000).

In addition, lecturers need to create a structured platform to engage in continuing professional development. Livneh and Livneh (1999) stress the need for opportunities for lecturers to reflect, engage in professional dialogue, work with students, engage in peer observation, coach their students and provide feedback. In the same vein, Baeten, Kyndt, Struyven and Dochy (2010) state that lecturers should possess the ability to assess, offer feedback, use a variety of teaching approaches, create the opportunity for interactivity, and maintain discipline in class. However, Mokone (2011) argues that lecturers and students have limited time to engage in teaching and learning, hence the low throughput rate that has been recorded in the past years.

The role of academic institutions – TVET colleges
Graduates cannot improve their employability on their own. A link between education and training systems and the world of work should be strengthened (ILO, 2011). The TVET college sector is better placed to excel in this area because it provides theoretical training and practical

experience at the same time. The TVET colleges need to become involved in helping graduates find employment. They should give their students job advertisements (NFVF, 2014) and show them how to apply and provide relevant information in their CVs. More time must be allocated for practice within the learning environment and the classroom should be designed to replicate the features of real work settings (Robinson, 2000).

Zhang and Zou (2013) suggest that work industry and work stations need to be converted into students' second classroom in order to give them more time for practice and to allow them to grasp the critical skills of employability. Roopnarain (2015) proposes that TVET colleges and workplaces should be integrated as it is done in Switzerland. This means that private sector employers should get involved in the development of key curricular aspects of the NC(V) programme. Graduates who have participated in the workplace experience prior to formal employment and those who did not have different chances on getting employed. Maher and Graves (2008) confirm that those graduates who participated in the workplace gained self-esteem before they accessed the real working life environment. The working life experience is overwhelming and the participation in the workplace experience reduces entry shock for graduates when they enter the job market (Shipton, West, Birdi & Patterson, 2006).

Major weaknesses have been identified as impediments to progress within the TVET sector. The Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE, 2016) has suggested ways of improving the TVET sector which include the following, amongst others:

- Compensating for basic education. The implication is that schools which are in essence supplying the TVET colleges with learners send learners whose academic performance is poor.
- Building capacity. The DHET has in most instances advocated for increased enrolment. Instead, the success of the TVET sector should be measured in terms of levels of graduation and the employability of graduates or improvement of the capacity of trainers (lecturers) and managers.
- Improving accountability. Full-time enrolments have been used partly as means to execute norms and standards for funding TVET colleges. Instead, it promotes quantitative rather than qualitative measures. Performance indicators for output or throughput rates should form the basis of better benchmarks.
- Increasing the role of business. A wider reluctance of employers and business sector has been observed and there is a need to change to working towards effective training.

The CDE (2016) further suggests that the government should provide employers with incentives to train people beyond their own needs in terms of profit.

The role of employers in enhancing employability prospects

No matter how well graduates are educated and armed with relevant employability skills, employers have the final word about who is employed. Employers have displayed a tendency to be biased especially when it comes to employing graduates from historically black institutions (NFVF, 2014) in certain spheres of employment, like the film industry. This reflects a discriminatory aspect that echoes the apartheid past. Poor quality education is stressed as the main reason for such unfortunate occurrences of unemployment.

A shared business principle is that if business products need to be made known to consumers, strides should be made to bring such products closer to the consumers. This idea does not apply in the employment relations between academic institutions, its programmes and the employers. Papier et al. (2012) reported that companies were not aware of the NC(V) programmes. Companies cannot be blamed in this situation because academic institutions and Government should be the initiators of sharing the information and knowledge of what NC(V) is about to the companies.

There appears to be no clarity on who should prepare TVET college graduates with regard to employability. Heaton, McCracken and Harrison (2008) state that government and employers alike expect higher education institutions to prepare graduates for the work environment, while Jackson (2010) calls it 'filling the gap' and producing work-ready employees. This view implies that the educational curriculum or academic institutions should be imbued with work-related activities. On the other hand, Andrews and Higson (2008) hold the view that employability skills can easily be developed outside the formal curriculum beyond which graduates do employment-based training and experience.

Roopnarain (2015) suggests that the TVET colleges, with the full involvement of Government, should change the system to become a strongly employer- and market-driven environment. TVET colleges play the role of supplier to the private sector. The employment sector knows exactly what kind of employees they are looking for, which makes it imperative for employers to contribute largely to the development of worker talents and skills.

It is costly to advertise jobs and to make use of the services of a recruitment agency. Employers should take advantage of the fact that they do not have to use recruitment agencies and pay additional fees to recruit NC(V) graduates but only need assistance from work placement officers (McGrath et al., 2010). A change in attitude would bring about the desired results in acquiring perfect employees at a lower cost facilitated by the TVET colleges.

The role of Government in fostering employment

The CDE (2016) has condemned the epidemic nature of unemployment, poverty and inequality which undermines South Africa's political gains through the skills shortage. The CDE (2016) has proposed two methods of widening the skills that currently exist in the country: the first was to equip South Africans with a solid foundation of knowledge and skills and the ability to use them productively. This was not successful since NC(V) programmes whose aim was to reduce scarcity of skills has not yielded any positive results in that regard. The second was to compensate for South Africa's existing skills shortage by recruiting skilled people from abroad. The issue of importing skilled people further raised a concern that importing would likely damage the development of South African skills (CDE, 2016).

Roopnarain (2015) suggests that government and academic institutions should establish a vertical and horizontal mobility for the NC(V) graduates through a flexible education and training. This is a further indication of the poor relationship between universities of technology and TVET colleges which at present hardly cooperate with each other. In this regard, Powell (2007) points to the lack of even and clear articulation between the TVET colleges and universities, worsened by the fact that both TVET college graduates and lecturing staff are also uncertain about requirements for university entrance for specific programmes. Vertical mobility implies that NC(V) graduates should be given a platform to further their studies in academic institutions such as universities of technology, while horizontal mobility implies that with the same qualifications obtained after graduating with NC(V) L4, graduates should be in a position to find employment. Contrary to the notion of vertical mobility of NC(V) graduates, the government objects to the ideal of TVET colleges offering qualifications that are beyond the exit NQF L4 (McGrath et al., 2010). Government only supports partnerships between the formal and informal employment sector that can encourage the absorption of NC(V) graduates into placement and permanent employment (DHET Budget Speech, 2013). The ability to identify the industry or employment sector compares the link between what is offered by the vocational institutions and the employers within the vicinity where the study was conducted.

Figure 2.2 reflects the employment sectors where South African NC(V) graduates may be employed after completing their studies and the scale of those sectors.
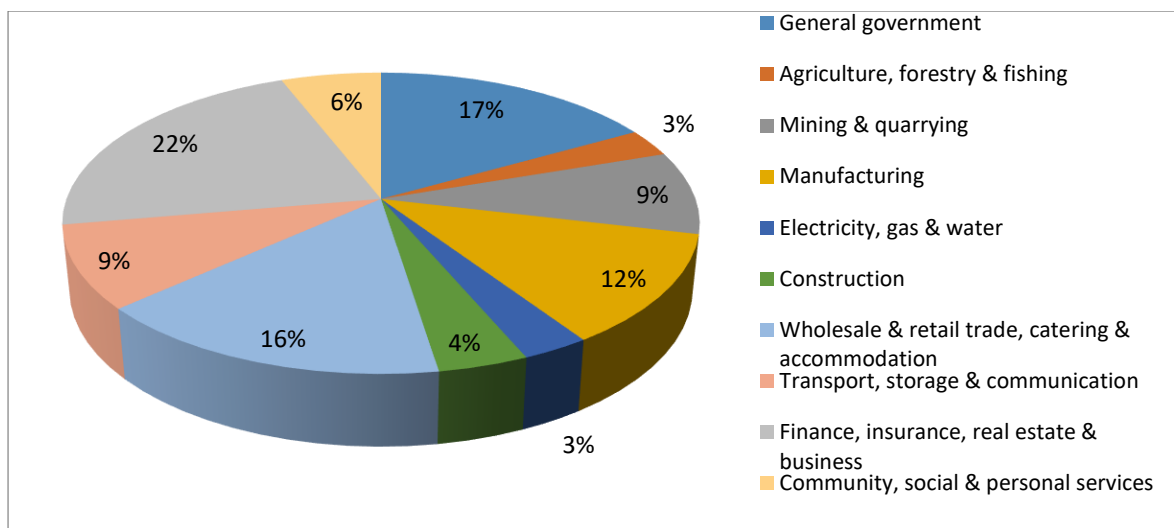
Figure 2.2: The employment sectors where NC(V) graduates can be employed (adapted from IDC, 2013:4)

The inability to identify employment sectors for the graduates after or even before completion of their studies may have dire consequences for the college graduates in general and the NC(V) graduates in particular. Placement officers may not be effective in their duties (finding work placement for graduates) if they do not recognise relevant individuals who work directly with recruitments in the workplace. As a result, such negative action by placement officers confirms what Wedekind (2010) identifies as obstacles of weak or fragile governance and management at various levels of the system and a weak knowledge and information base and/or processing capacity. Knowledge of the above aspects may assist the placement officers in determining speedily whether there are spaces available for internships/apprenticeships in companies. Programmes that are aligned to employment sectors or companies situated close to surrounding settlements promote less costly migration and unplanned relocation by those graduates seeking employment.

2.7.2   Incorporating technology into the NC(V) curriculum

Usage of technology has become an important aspect of life in society, education and various work environments for effective communication, efficient academic and work outcomes. Salomon, Perkins and Globerson (2011) define technology as a tool that supports and expands the theory of human capabilities which make it possible to control work and individual's well-being. Kerka's (1994) definition of technology is that it is the conveyor for developing awareness of social context and implications. All NC(V) programmes have one fundamental subject, Life Orientation, which has an information communication and technology (ICT) component (a practical component), with graduates practising computer skills from L2–L4 for three consecutive years. This technological aspect has been incorporated

into the NC(V) curriculum because it adds value to social and academic development towards work readiness.

ICT skills have been found to be the core aspect in the employability of graduates. A report by UNESCO (2012) stressed that gaining employment depended on how graduates effectively and efficiently employed ICT skills. Each daily work activity involves that offices should obtain or provide information using current technologies including computers whereby typed documents can be sent via e-mails (Internet connection), faxes (telephonic connections) and others to relevant stakeholders. This means that ICT skills needed for economic and industrial sustainability should be incorporated into the NC(V) curriculum in order to advance social sustainability (Saud, Shu'aibu, Buntat & Jabor, 2012). Adequate ICT skills for employment enable graduates to fit into knowledge-based society and to cope with new skills demanded by current labour markets (Saud et al., 2012).

NC(V) graduates' knowledge of the employment sector through ICT enables them to gather information about potential positions. The practicality of vocational programmes may also enable NC(V) graduates to focus on other employability avenues such as volunteerism and self-employment as alternative means to survive.

2.7.3   Establishing volunteerism

When employers need workers, they use various media houses to advertise availability of jobs but if there are no advertisements, NC(V) graduates can individually explore the aspect of volunteerism as a strategy to gain experience towards employability. Volunteering offers graduates an opportunity to develop new and transferrable skills. Expanding personal and professional networks serves as an opportunity for career exploration, and hiring managers to value volunteerism and building a track record of work for a specific cause (Greene, 2014). Employers observe a volunteer from the perspective of the volunteer's dedication to work without compensation, willingness to offer services without monetary gain and sharing their knowledge without expectations. Besides offering the volunteer an opportunity to prove endurance at work, they may likely recommend the volunteer for any available post.

However, volunteerism has been found to be unpopular and it is evident that the low participation rate of youth in volunteer work needs to be addressed through a youth service programme (Watters, 2008). When volunteerism does not seem to work to the advantage of NC(V) graduates, they may look elsewhere for experience, including self-employment discussed in the section below.

2.7.4 Encouraging self-employment

Employability should not be viewed as an answer to who, where and how an individual obtains or provides job opportunities. Self-employment is a job opportunity heavily embedded in business establishment whose only hindrance could be the start-up capital. For a self-employment contender to succeed, he or she needs to perfect the required attributes and skills as suggested by Lowden et al. (2011). Initiatives such as helping graduates in starting up small businesses could be the right path towards improving employability, but this needs courage and a mind shift from graduates because at present most students appear to be studying towards a particular qualification with the aim of gaining employment. While both the government and employers appear to emphasise that educational institutions should prepare graduates for the world of work, self-employment is another method of improving employability (Heaton et al., 2008).

However, some researchers do not believe that self-employment has the capacity to contribute towards employment. More than a decade ago, Morrow, Pandy and Richter (2005) stated that self-employment had a minimal success rate, with only 6% of youth being self-employed. This research study did not aim to determine how far self-employment contributed to employability but the above-mentioned percentage indicates that most graduates provided lack of employment opportunities as a reason for engaging in self-employment (Morrow et al., 2005). However, the ideal of self-employment outweighs the pessimism reflected above because graduates learn to work on their own, thus becoming their own bosses, working their own predetermined number of hours, on their own terms, negotiating own deals with clients and making their profit. Pieck (2011), who disagrees that self-employment has a minimal success rate, notes the benefits such as socialisation, empowerment and internal motivation to set up micro-businesses as a form of self-employment. Initiatives aimed at supporting self-employment receive funding from the government and other specific NGOs.

As governments try to curb the high unemployment rate, institutions such as the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) and the Umsobomvu Youth Funds (UYF) were established to help fund companies started by the youth and NC(V) graduates. Since its inception, the NYDA was known for its purpose as an enterprise financial institution mandated to service the unemployed youth of South Africa with loans to start businesses. This move has since changed from loans to micro-finance grants to help youth participate in gaining entrepreneurial and corporate knowledge and skills (NYDA, 2014:3). The grant could be useful in areas such as training, business registration, purchasing tools and venues (work-site).

The NYDA has to initiate a self-evaluation portfolio which indicates all beneficiaries of the funding given out to business establishment for the youth and in particular to NC(V) graduates. On running these business establishments, these graduates gain proven knowledge and skills for which during that period such knowledge and skills transform into experience for employability, while enabling financial profit.

2.8   Summary

Following on Chapter 1, which focused on employability as framed within this particular study, Chapter 2 provided a review of relevant literature pertaining to employability within the wider vocational education context. The historical overview of how TVET graduates' employability has been shaped by national events set the scene for a conceptualisation of employability as situated within a triangular relationship between students, lecturers and employers. The chapter further explored the importance of employability and the benefits of employment. Concerns surrounding graduates' employability were raised, as well as reported strategies to improve employability.

The next chapter will focus on the research design and methodology which is the basic discussion of how the phenomenon was investigated.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

This chapter outlines how data was obtained in this study. Vargas-Hernández (2012) defines research methodology as an inquiry of living and/or non-living objects and deals specifically with how data is collected, analysed and interpreted. Furthermore, research methodology refers to a model used to conduct a study within the context of a particular paradigm (Wahyuni, 2012) with the aim of assisting and making researchers broadly understand the process of gathering data (Cohen et al., 2007). Since the methodology represents a route towards a certain destination; the study was conducted within the context of a particular paradigm (Wahyuni, 2012) as discussed in the section to follow.

3.2   Research design

As indicated in the first chapter, the study was positioned within an interpretivist research paradigm. In a logical sense, the interpretivist paradigm (a social science) differs from a natural science because it is socially constructed (Mack, 2010; Gould & Sarvioskouey, 2012). Interpretivist researchers place more emphasis on understanding the social world than explaining it (Krauss, 2005; Gould & Sarvioskouey, 2012). The research is therefore carried out through an interpretative analysis of the participants' actions within their social world and how they understand it (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The studied phenomenon in this study related to investigating how NC(V) graduates, lecturers and prospective employers' supervisory representatives perceived NC(V) graduates' employability. In this study, NC(V) graduates, lecturers and potential employers of graduates from selected programmes at a particular college campus formed the main data sources.

Wahyuni (2012) state that interpretivists believe an ontological perspective can only be created and understood better by the social actors involved and their perceptions of the studied phenomenon. In this study, NC(V) graduates' experience as TVET college returnees could be better expressed and perceived by them as social actors seeking to improve the employability phenomenon; and that view was extended to lecturers, as well as employer representatives for their part as stakeholders. Interpretivist researchers also find interest in working with qualitative data which provide rich descriptions of a social reality (also known as an idiographic approach) (Neuman, 2011). Data collection and analysis are influenced by the

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interaction between the researcher and the participants, which highlight participants' experiences (Wahyuni, 2012).

3.3 Research methodology

Researchers who use case study are urged to seek out what is common and what is particular about the case. This involves careful and in-depth consideration of the nature of the case, historical background, physical setting, and other institutional and political contextual factors (Stake, 1998). An interpretive or social constructivist approach to qualitative case study research supports a transactional method of inquiry, where the researcher has a personal interaction with the case. The case is developed in a relationship between the researcher and informants, and presented to engage the reader, inviting them to join in this interaction and in case discovery (Stake, 1995).

The NC(V) has three levels (Levels 2, 3 and 4), which are equivalent to Grades 10, 11 and 12 of the schooling system. The fundamental subjects are English FAL; Life Orientation and Mathematics/Mathematical Literacy. Vocational subjects for Information Technology: Office Data Practice; Systems Analysis and Design; Computer Programming; Electronics; Computer Hardware and Software and Principles of Computer Programming and Introduction to Information Systems. Vocational subjects for Marketing: Marketing; Marketing Communication; Advertizement and Promotions; and Consumer Behaviour. Vocational Subjects for Generic Management: Operations Management; Financial Management; Entrepreneurship and Management Practice.

College	Campus	Management	Lecturers	NC(V) Courses	Subjects	Classes
King Hintsa	Dutywa	Campus Manager, HOD and Senior Lectuers x2	5 Males 11 Females	Information Technology;	Eng; LO; Maths; ODP; CP; PCP; SAD; CHS & Electronics	10 Normal 3 Computer Labs
				Generic Management	Eng; LO; Maths Lit; Op.Man.; Fin.Man; Entre & Man.Prac	
				and Marketing	Eng; LO; Maths Lit; Marketing; Marketing Comm.; Advert & Consumer.	

Figure 3.1: The table reflecting the setting of the research study

The experience of having worked just over ten years in the TVET College sector made it inevitably observable to register the negative trend of how NC(V) graduates completed L4 but later returned to the same institution or another to enrol for the Nated Course. The complexity of NC(V) graduates' employability is exacerbated by the rurality at which the campus is situated, two kilometres East of Dutywa Town. The campus specializes in Information and Computer Technology with fifteen lecturers teaching in the three programmes. The Campus Management comprises of the Campus Manager, the Head of Division and two Senior Lecturers. In terms of infrastructure and resource, there are no difficulties experienced except late delivery of teaching materials used for the ISAT component.

The following are business entities that NC(V) graduates may try their luck for prospective job opportunities: Nedbank; Pep Stores; Spargs Idutywa Superspar; Tints General Trading Pty Ltd; Idutywa Pharmacy; Umbono Telecommunication Network; PZ Security Services; Family Funeral Brokers; Teba Bank Ltd; HS Tutu & Sons; Idutywa Municipality; Nombambela Incorporated; FnB Idutywa Branch; Joley's Shoes; A & J Tyre Centre; Meat Centre; Barnetts Furnishers; Potelwa's Butchery; Eat Some Meat; Freeword Electronics Radio and TV Repairs; Ngumbela's Mini Market; Welcome Bottle Store; Idutywa Bookshop; Finaid Financial Services; Qoma Funerals CC; Idutywa Bottle Store Pty Ltd; Qoma Communicatios; Idutywa Funeral Parlour; German Technical Co-OP; Transkei Wholesalers; Weir's Cash and Carry; Kentucky Fried Chicken; Nokwakha Bricks; Tops At Spar; Cloth 'n Clobber; Bergers Stores Ltd; Klaas DM; NRC Mine Labour Organisation; Mtshawuza Store; Canca RS and Associates; Jackpot Bazaar; Monde Klaas Metal Works; A1 Bazaar; Main Road Motor Spares; Kayaletu Store; Idutywa Garage; La Fontana Dry Cleaners; Kwa Zanempucuko Traditional Garments; Ai Café; Keith's Take-Aways; Capitec Idutywa; Mapoyi's Burglar Proofing; Masonic Hotel and Blue Lemon Art Studio.

A case study methodology was suitable and applicable to this study in that most research regarding the NC(V) programme is contemporary and the employability of NCV graduates complex (Eisenhardt, 1989). In addition, NC(V) graduates' employability (regarded as relevant behaviours) cannot be manipulated (Yin, 2003; Rowley, 2002). The NC(V) employability situation cannot be resolved overnight and no quick fix scheme can be employed.

Merriam (2009) explains that the case study methodology maintains extreme attachment to the core values and intentions and is particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. In addition, the case study draws together naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological and biographic research methods in a bricoleur design (Stake, 1995). The idea of bringing a variety

of research methods into the case study illuminated the manner in which the employability of NC(V) graduates could be resolved.

A number of reasons informed the choice of a case study methodology. One of the reasons was its flexibility (Hyett, Kenny & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Furthermore, intrinsic case is used to understand particulars of the single case rather than what it represents (Hyett et al., 2014). Besides data collection and interpretation emerging from multiple sources of evidence (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2004), data was gathered without involving numerical ways of answering research questions (Wahyuni, 2012). NC(V) graduates from the identified programmes, the exit level 4 lecturers and a selection of prospective employers around Dutywa Town were asked to participate in the study.

The case study methodology supports a transactional method of inquiry where the researcher has personal interest with the case (Hyett et al., 2014). In the case of the current study, it entailed that the researcher observed NC(V) graduates' unemployment trend. Yin (2003) provides a rationale for employing the 'why' or 'how' questions by saying that they deal with operational links in the study, which have to be inquired over a period of time. The current study needed to address the question: 'How do stakeholders perceive the employability of NC(V) graduates from a Technical and Vocational Education and Training college?'

In this study I used interviews to obtain data that required me, as the researcher, to frame my questions to suit the three categories of participants: students, lecturers and potential employers' supervisory representatives. In such a study, the researcher's questions may not be rigid as follow-up questions are acceptable and this is where clarity of meaning is ensured.

In order to improve and fully understand the case study, additional information such as the physical, institutional, political and community context should be added (Stake, 1998). In this study, the inquiry was focused on the following courses: Generic Management, Information Technology and Marketing Management at the Dutywa campus, King Hintsa TVET College. Data was collected from NC(V) graduates, lecturers and potential employers' supervisory representatives. The interest of this inquiry revolved around the employability of NC(V) graduates with special attention paid to how NC(V) graduates, lecturers and employers perceived employability. The above phrase presented by Stake (1998) highlights the real life context advocated by Yin (1994) which involves the teaching and learning context, lecturers and students, and employers at their respective businesses, as well as the government sector.

Case study methodology is especially well suited to produce concrete, context-dependent knowledge; this can be achieved from a continued proximity to the studied reality and through feedback from those under study (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The worst scenario sketched by case study critics was that the academics and researchers treated the fact that workers and organisations consisted of human beings as almost an afterthought (Patton & Appelbaum, 2003). This was not surprising, seeing that Hamel (1993) had earlier argued that the case study could be strongly faulted for its lack of representativeness as a point of observation for a social phenomenon as well as its lack of rigor in the collection, construction, and analysis of the empirical materials that gave rise to the study. Such thought would deny individuals and institutions a chance to develop the required knowledge. On a positive note, the participants in the current study shared their views regarding the NC(V) programme, how far they understood its operational elements, future preparations for the employment opportunities and how best employment institutions could contribute towards employment.

The view that cross-sectional studies are carried out at one-time point or over a short period has been supported by a variety of researchers (Olsen & George, 2004; Levin, 2006). The purpose of the cross-sectional study is to find the prevalence of the outcome of interest for the population or subgroups within the population at a given time point (Levin, 2006). In the current study, the participants (including six NC(V) graduates from the selected programmes, three L4 lecturers and four employers' supervisory representatives of selected business institutions) answered questions that shed light on their perceptions on employability.

3.4   Population and sampling

Klopper (2008) defines a sample as a subset of the population that is selected for a particular study. A purposive sampling approach was used in this study. Participants were chosen due to their expertise (Bond, 2007); this applied especially to lecturers and employers' supervisory representatives in the institutions included in the study. Purposive sampling is also known as a means of choosing participants due to their characteristics and qualities they possess (Tongco, 2007). In the current study, supervisors in the potential workplaces monitored the work progress of new recruits, which made them suitable to giving accurate data about new recruits. Lecturers could provide details of how their subjects linked with the world of work and also their contribution towards the employability of their NC(V) graduates. Lecturers' positions gave them reliability status as they engaged with the NC(V) graduates, assisting graduates about conduct, attitude and determination to succeed at work. NC(V) graduates provided important information on how their qualifications prepared them (if at all) for the world of work in the area.

Altogether 13 participants (N=13) were selected for interviews as part of the population in the study. The population in this study included six NC(V) graduates (n=6), one of whom had completed level 4, but was not employed, and five who had returned to the college to follow a course in the NATED programme. Three graduates for Generic Management; one graduate for Marketing Management and two graduates for Information Technology were invited to participate in this study. These graduates related their experiences of completing level 4 but without a job and/or factors leading to their return to the college.

The population also included three NC(V) lecturers (n=3) who lectured in the exit level 4, one from each programme (Generic Management, Marketing Management and Information Technology). The lecturers shared their perceptions of aspects that add value to – or limit – the employability of NC(V) graduates. Lecturers who were invited to participate in this study were the heads of programme of the three selected programmes, namely Generic Management, Marketing Management and Information Technology. These lecturers taught two or more subjects in their respective fields. In Generic Management, the lecturer taught Financial Management and Mathematical Literacy. In Marketing Management, the lecturer taught Advertising and Promotions and Marketing. In Information Technology, the lecturer taught Introduction to Systems Development; Electronics and Principles of Computer Programming. The lecturers in the selected programmes discussed their perceptions about promoting the employability of NC(V) graduates.

Four employers' supervisory representatives (n=4) within selected local businesses and government offices (such as commercial banks, restaurants, supermarket retailers and government institutions including the police station and clinic, and social development and education departments where Dutywa Campus is situated) elaborated on their criteria for recruiting new employees and provided feedback regarding how new recruits were expected to conduct themselves at work.

During the interview sessions, a digital recorder was used to record the interviews conducted with each of the participants. Besides the interviews, documents from the NATED programme indicating the number of graduates who had completed N6, and how many were working were compared with those who had completed NC(V) L4 in order to give an accurate account of NC(V) employment. Attention was paid to how many NC(V) graduates had been placed in internships, voluntary work and work-based learning, with a specific focus on students who had completed exit level 4 in Generic Management, Marketing and Information Technology programmes that are offered at the Dutywa campus, King Hintsa (TVET) College.

3.5   Data collection and analysis

3.5.1   Data collection

Interviews were used to collect data and were linked to the case study methodology. Using interviews in gathering data from the participants served to corroborate information that I, as the researcher, had ascertained (Yin, 2003). Interviews are defined as a method of collecting data with the interviewer asking or directing questions to the interviewee face-to-face or by telephone (Polit & Beck, 2006). Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted to obtain data from the participants. By using a semi-structured interview, the researcher is able to structure the interview, but at the same time allows for deeper probing in order to obtain rich data (Robson, 2002). Semi-structured interviews are organised beforehand as questions are planned ahead of the interviews, while probing questions develop during interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The participants were asked open-ended questions during the interviews and they subsequently provided information about the phenomenon being investigated (Yin, 2003).

Even though interviews are widely used to collect data, this method has both advantages and disadvantages. Yin (2003) points out that interviews are subject to the common problems of bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation. To overcome these disadvantages, the interviews were audiotaped in order to provide a more accurate rendition of each interview, as recommended by Yin (2003).

Businesses that were identified to participate in the study were two local major banks, four government departments, two supermarkets and two eating outlets around Dutywa Town. In each of the selected institutions, only one relevant individual took part – the person entrusted with supervising the new employees. In the government departments that took part in this study, only one participant in a supervisory position was selected and asked to participate. Whether institutions are private or public entities, consumers need to know about the business or services offered by these institutions. Firstly, this requires marketers to engage with the consumers, clients or the communities served by these institutions. This served as rationale for including the NC(V) Marketing programme. Secondly, the same institutions need individuals who will manage the offices and people, and who will connect these offices through technology. Therefore, the Generic Management and Information Technology programmes are relevant.

Triangulation of data was applicable in this study (Patton, 2002), as data was collected from multiple sources, including former NC(V) graduates, lecturers and employers' supervisory

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representatives from the selected business and government institutions. When a researcher uses multiple sources of evidence in case studies, the researcher is able to address a variety of historical, attitudinal and behavioural issues (Yin, 2003). The use of triangulation in this study increased the opportunities for validating the findings of the study report (Stake, 1995). A conclusion or finding deeply embedded within a case study methodology is likely to be more convincing and accurate as it is supported by the different sources of data that have been corroborated (Yin, 2003).

To further strengthen the application of triangulation, the researcher analysed documents requested from the institution where the research study was conducted. Documents that were requested included results for the consecutive academic years of 2013, 2014 and 2015 for the purpose of identifying NC(V) graduates. Furthermore, the researcher asked for the graduation list that also served the purpose of guaranteeing those who completed their studies or L4. The process of analysing the documents assisted in establishing the average candidates who completed the programme at a particular point in time against the other academic years and also to examine the employment prospects between those who completed NC(V) against the Nated graduates. The process also allowed the researcher to observe and further trace all those students who returned to the vocational institutions to do the Nated courses. On completion of the document analysis, those NC(V) graduates who returned to vocational institutions not easily accessible were automatically removed from the list of study participants. Only those NC(V) graduates accessible to the researcher were invited to partake in the research study.

3.5.2   Data analysis

Content analysis was used to analyse the obtained data. Krippendorff's definition of content analysis was adopted in this study. Krippendorff (2012) describes content analysis as a technique which makes valid inferences from the texts to the context of their use. Content analysis assists in the formulation of the findings of a research study. The focus of content analysis is based on the attributes, social relationships, public behaviours and institutional realities of the phenomenon under study (Krippendorff, 2012). Hancock, Windridge and Ockleford (2007) explain that content analysis involves highlighting concepts, words or occurrences in documents and reporting them in tabular form. If participants gave more or less similar responses, the researcher may derive themes and meaning that assist in the implication of the study. The more similar the responses, the more conclusive the findings will be. In this study I applied the eleven steps of content analysis suggested by Cohen et al. (2007):

- *Defining the research question to be addressed by the content analysis*

  The research question arose due to the perceptions surrounding the NC(V) programme regarding the employability of the NC(V) graduates. This implies that participants' perceptions and lived experiences must be visible in the transcribed and reported text.

- *Defining the population from which units of text are to be sampled*

  Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain data from the selected participants, who included L4 lecturers and NC(V) graduates from Generic Management, Marketing and Information Technology programmes and supervisors from business and government institutions indicated earlier in this chapter.

- *Defining the sample to be included*

  Purposive sampling was used in this study due to the expertise and experiences required from participants. The sample was comprised of three lecturers who taught the exit L4, six NC(V) graduates, and four employers' supervisory representatives earmarked to be interviewed.

- *Defining the context of generation of the document*

  As outlined initially, semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded so as to capture accurately what had been said by participants during the interviews. I transcribed each interview recording that had been obtained during the interviews (Pillay, Boulton-Lewis & Wilss, 2004). The replay of recording authenticates and validates the data provided by the participants.

- *Defining the unit of analysis*

  The concept of employability drove me to explore who had the capacity to be employed. The unit of analysis in this regard was the perceptions of stakeholders on the employability of all the NC(V) graduates who had completed L4 in the selected programmes but were unable to find employment opportunities and the perceptions of some graduates returning to the college to further their studies on the alternative programme, the NATED programme.

- *Deciding the codes to be used in the analysis*

  Saldaña (2013) defines a code as a researcher-generated construct that symbolises and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorisation, theory building and other analytic processes.

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Descriptive code analysis was applied in this study. The interviewees' responses made up transcripts that will be written on the left part of the page while codified words were written on the right.

For example:

RAW DATA   **CODES**

At this stage, data was segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation (Grbich, 2007).

- *Constructing the categories for analysis*

   Key features of the text/words that are associated with 'hard' (how NC(V) graduates find it hard to get employment), 'recruit' (how employers recruit new employees) and 'employee conduct' (how new recruits or employees conduct themselves in the workplace) were grouped together.

- *Conducting the coding and categorising of the data*

   The researcher used classification reasoning to determine which pieces of data were alike when grouping them together (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First the main categories were identified, after which subcategories were placed under those main categories. In this phase of categorisation more subcategories emerged.

For example:

COLUMN 1	**COLUMN 2**	**COLUMN 3**
Raw Data	**Preliminary Code**	**Final Code**

- *Conducting the data analysis*

   Friese (2012) recommends that the number of final codes that can be achieved by a researcher should range between 120 and 300 in total. According to Lichtman (2010), qualitative studies in education can generate between 80 and 100 codes that can be rearranged into 15–20 categories and ultimately reduced to subcategories of 5–7 major themes. Rowley (2002) argues it is advantageous to a case if the number of units is smaller while the extent of detail available for each case is greater.

- *Summarising*

   As observed in the research question, a lack of employability became a phenomenon in the particular context. The findings are summarised in the next chapter (Chapter 4).

- *Making speculative inferences*

  The NC(V) curriculum was designed with the aim of producing skilled personnel after graduating with the L4 certificate. Little was known about the situation that at the end of the three years in the TVET college graduates could not gain access to higher education nor to the labour market. It is for this reason that this study investigated the employability of NC(V) graduates. Conclusions were finally drawn and implications for theory, policy, practice and further research discussed (see Chapter 5).

3.6   Trustworthiness and credibility

Research of any kind has its objective firmly embedded in finding the truth about a phenomenon of interest. To arrive at the truth, the data accumulated along the way must be trustworthy and credible. Whatever activity done in the research, there is an individual at the centre of it all: the researcher. According to Patton (2002), the researcher is a research instrument. My role, as the researcher, was to conduct interviews, do regular observations and peruse valuable documents that would assist in the investigation of the phenomenon under study.

In pursuit of trustworthy findings and results, Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed a criterion for research using qualitative data involving the key aspects discussed below.

3.6.1   Credibility

In terms of research, Merriam (1998) defines credibility as a concept that deals with the question of how close in agreement the findings are with reality. In case the data collection in the current study was flawed, the findings of the study would obviously not be credible. Therefore, to ensure credibility of the findings in this study I audio-taped the interviews during data collection. Regarding transparency in support of credibility, Patton and Cochran (2002) argue that methods should be clearly indicated so that audiences can understand precisely how the data was collected and analysed. Likewise, Tracy (2010) refers to being sincere in order to add value by means of good use of reflexivity and transparency.

As the researcher I built confidence with the participants in terms of the context of the study such that they were able to divulge their experiences and perceptions (Klopper & Knobloch, 2008a) of employability. I enhanced credibility through the use of multiple data sources from different participants (Klopper, 2008). Patton and Cochran (2002) point out that the questions

researchers ask and the manner in which those questions are asked should be reasonable in that they should generate truthful accounts of the phenomena and provide enough detail and explanation with the inclusion of different perspectives (Tracy, 2010).

For the research findings to remain credible, Tracy (2010) further states that the research should be done on a worthy topic, meaning it must be relevant, timely, significant and interesting. Furthermore, the research must be richly rigorous, which implies that a suitable theoretical basis must have been applied, appropriate methods used and enough data collected. Perceptions regarding employability of NC(V) graduates was seen as a worthy topic since all stakeholders (including the graduates themselves, the TVET college and its academic staff, Government, and potential employers) are influenced by the employability of the graduates in the study setting.

3.6.2   Confirmability

Confirmability can be achieved through the involvement of informants and conditions of research and not of other forms of bias, motives and perspectives (Sliep, Poggenpoel & Gmeiner, 2001). In order to avoid bias, I used a systematic approach to ensure that it was not just about picking interviewees or data that supported my pre-existing ideas about the answers (Patton & Cochran, 2002). I employed confirmability audit and triangulation (Klopper & Knobloch, 2008a) including the use of same questions for a particular group of participants but another set of different questions for the remainder of two groups of participants, all emanating from the main question.

Since participation in the study involved different individuals, ethical consideration became mandatory, which meant taking a holistic approach to research ethics (Tracy, 2010). The holistic approach to research ethics means keeping the highest levels of research standards. Participants' involvement is placed in confidence that the researcher will not do anything to cause damage of any kind whether planned or abrupt. All the participants in the study were approached later to confirm if data collected was accurate and in case there were factually incorrect statements they would be corrected before the study was made public.

3.6.3   Dependability

Dependability refers to the strategy used to test if research findings would be consistent in case the inquiry could be replicated with the same participants and in a similar context (Klopper, 2008). Furthermore, dependability could be achieved through traceable variability and identifiable sources (Sliep, Poggenpoel & Gmeiner, 2001). In order to further maintain

dependability, I employed thick description of methodology and triangulation (Klopper & Knobloch, 2008a). In describing dependability, Patton and Cochran (2002) use a different concept, namely 'reproducibility' meaning that another individual researcher could use the same topic guide to generate similar information and arrive at similar findings. Although participants in this study could not produce exactly worded responses, they provided answers from exactly the same sub-questions that were designed by the researcher.

3.6.4   Transferability

In terms of research, transferability is the ability to generalise findings to a larger population (Klopper, 2008). Although the research was conducted at a particular campus of a particular TVET college, through the findings in this study, prominent researchers could extend the scope of research investigation and its findings to the sister campuses and observe similarities in such different contexts and groups. Tracy (2010) deems it necessary that in doing so, there should always be a certain level of coherence in the study, which implies doing what it claims, using suitable methods, and making meaningful connections between literature, findings and interpretations.

3.7   Summary

This chapter provided an overview of how data was collected and the interlink that existed between the steps taken during data collection. Interviews were chosen as the method best suited for collecting data that also guaranteed the interlink mentioned above. The interviews allowed me, as the researcher, to interact with the participants (interpretivist research design) within a chosen real-life context (case study methodology). Lastly, population and sampling (determining participants), data analysis and the ethical considerations (ensuring safety for the participants) to help guide and shape the study were discussed. The next chapter presents the findings, a key aspect that represents what participants alluded to regarding their experiences and perceptions about the employability of NC(V) graduates.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1   Introduction

In this chapter the results and findings obtained from the collected data in this study are provided. The interview data were analysed by means of conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In the process, I immersed myself in the data, thus enabling new insights to emerge (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002) and further allowing categories to flow from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The interviews involved participants from different contextual settings, positions and responsibilities. Different codes were used to identify the type of participants: P-G1 to P-G6 represented the graduates, while P-L1 to P-L3 represented the lecturers, and P-S1 to P-S4 represented the employers' representatives or supervisors. Thus 13 interviews were conducted in total. An interview schedule was designed and followed precisely to facilitate the process of meeting with the participants.

Six themes emerged from the data, which were classified as follows:
- Knowledge and understanding of the NC(V) programme
- NC(V) employability skills
- Institutional relations regarding NC(V) graduates' employability
- Planning for employability
- Role of the government on NC(V) employability
- Responses of NC(V) graduates to their unemployment

These themes are used as a framework for discussing the findings below.

4.2   Knowledge and understanding of the NC(V) programme

From this theme, categories emerged directly linked to the responses given by participants during the interviews, namely a lack of NC(V) programme knowledge, questioning the level of NC(V) programmes, and a programme ending.

Lack of NC(V) programme knowledge

The study participants – including NC(V) graduates, lecturers, and potential employers' representatives (supervisors) – were asked about their knowledge and understanding of what the NC(V) is about. Their responses – including the responses from lecturers and graduates – reflected a lack of understanding of the NC(V) curriculum. The graduates' responses could be summed up by the responses of participant P-G1, P-G3 and P-G5:

> *Some students don't have an idea what NC(V) is; I went to the college and never researched about the college; I didn't know that behind the scenes how do the servers or the big machines operate.* (P-G1)

> *What I understand about NC(V) programmes is that when you are doing L2, it's equivalent to Grade 10, L3 is equivalent to Grade 11 and L4 is equivalent to Grade 12. As they said L4 is equivalent to Grade 12 I conclude that it is the same as repeating Grade 12. But I can on the other hand note that with NC(V) it is just better than someone who has done Grade 12 because you have got skills since you engage in practical activities including the theory.* (P-G3)

> *I think people are still uneducated about the NC(V) or the value of NC(V) certificate.* (P-G5)

What is missing about the participants' understanding of NC(V) is failure to observe that the NC(V) programmes are designed towards achieving a particular form of vocational technical knowledge and skills, for example marketing. If a student decides to take up the Marketing course, all the four vocational subjects relate to marketing, for example: Advertising and Promotions; Consumer Behaviour; Marketing Communication and Marketing. A student who has passed L4 in Marketing and a learner who has passed Grade 12, when they enrol at the university for the same course in marketing, the conceptualisation level of the two students will not be the same since the person with Grade 12 will be experiencing the theory of marketing for the first time.

Almost none of the participants in the study could provide vivid details or draw an image of how the NC(V) graduates may have acquired the skills they possess. In the event that participants are unable to provide evidence of skills acquisition, the implication is similar to what employers claim, namely that vocational institutions cannot develop graduates' employability skills (Peddle, 2000).

Similar responses were given by lecturers with minor exceptions of substantiating the difference between NC(V) and its counterpart, the National Senior Certificate (or NSC) which

falls within the high school FET band. Lecturers' responses were summed up by participant P-L1:

> So, I think NC(V) has been developed so that if the learner wants to do for example marketing, that learner may not go to Grade 10, Grade 11 and Grade 12, that learner may undergo the NC(V) programme whereby she can get the foundation of marketing programme. When he or she enters the tertiary level the learner will be having a foundation, he or she will be credible rather than the learner from the high school because that NC(V) learner does have basic or foundational skills that are required in the tertiary institutions.

The responses from graduates and lecturers indicate that they see the NC(V) curriculum as a duplication of the FET band within the high schools. To expand on the distinguishable characteristics of the FET band of the high schools and NC(V), it is noted that for each level of NC(V), Umalusi, the accreditation institution in South African education, quality assures all academic activities of the NC(V), which culminates in awarding certificates for each NQF level.

Lecturers interviewed indicated that neither the government nor potential employers understood what the NC(V) was about:

> … this means that government departments have no clue as to what is happening in the NC(V) programmes. (P-L2)

> … seemingly, some employers have no idea about NC(V), they don't understand what L4 is unlike when you talk of Report 191 (NATED). (P-L3)

The responses from the potential employer representatives (supervisors) who were interviewed substantiated this state of affairs and indicated inadequate understanding of the NC(V). Some – like participant P-S4 – did not even know that such a qualification existed:

> I'm not clear about NC(V), can you explain? It is the first time I hear of NC(V). I didn't know what is NC(V). It is the first time I hear of NC(V). I didn't know what NC(V) is. (P-S4)

> We have not been having such graduates; No, I don't really know anything regarding NC(V) programmes except that I would judge their capacity. (P-S3)

> The programmes are new. (P-S1)

> *I don't know much but what I know students do come in any department claiming that it is part of the requirement to do experiential training; there is not been much knowledge in terms of differentiating between NC(V) and NATED.* (P-S2)

Based on such responses it is not surprising that the local potential employers in Dutywa Town do not take part in the employment of NC(V) graduates in the area where the study was situated.

The finding of this study explain McGrath and Akoojee's (2009) view that vocational institutions in South Africa are of low quality and low status; a situation that causes potential employers, Government and the public to develop negative perceptions. This view echoes Oketch's (2007) observation that young adults choose academic education over vocational education on the basis that vocational education leads to unemployment and underpaying work that is repetitive and boring. Grade 12 is the basic requirement for entry into a diploma or degree programme, meaning it serves as a passport to further learning but is seemingly not enough to find a job. In terms of the Relevant Education Qualifications Value (REQV), Grade 12 is at REQV 12 while most jobs are advertised at REQV 13, thus requiring a diploma qualification.

After the introduction of the NC(V) programmes, vocational institutions were expected to market the new curriculum, and to bring the curriculum closer to ordinary citizens and potential employers. Quite often the students who enrol at TVET colleges for the NC(V) have been unable to obtain their NSC through the formal school system, unable to find a job, and/or unable to enrol in a higher education institution (Gewer, 2010). Therefore, the NC(V) has become a contingency arrangement and/or alternative educational route for many students. Zungu and Munakandafa (2014) challenge TVET colleges to position themselves to make positive links with students even prior to their enrolment. With nearly all the respondents in this study showing a limited understanding of NC(V) programmes, this brings to question a challenge of how the local TVET colleges articulate their programmes with special reference to their feeder schools, communities and local businesses.

Questioning the level of NC(V) programmes

In this category, the participants questioned the level at which NC(V) programmes were pitched:

> *I noticed that the NC(V) programmes were more heavier because in NC(V) you have to pass all seven subjects rather than in matric. After completion of L4 [I thought] I'm going to get more work opportunities, but unfortunately not.* (P-G5)

The participant supported what Roopnarain (2015) has pointed out: that the NC(V) curriculum had been pitched too high, which makes it difficult for students who only completed Grade 9 to succeed. Most of these students drop out in their first year or fail at L2 because they cannot cope. Unfortunately, those graduates who completed the NC(V) L4 struggle to find work experience.

The NC(V) curriculum is subjected to lower standards in terms of entrance levels (passed Gr.9), while in its current form it has adopted higher education's pass mark of 50%. Students who pass L4 find it easier to pass the NATED programmes where the expected pass mark is only 40%, which is similar to that of the NSC (Wedekind, 2013) with Mathematics 30%. The 50% pass mark for the NC(V) vocational subjects is way above that of its counterparts, the NSC and the NATED programmes, which is an indication of quality in the structure and content of NC(V) curriculum. Yet no clear pathway is guaranteed that NC(V) graduates would continue with their studies to the universities, while employment opportunities seem to be similarly limited. Lecturers (P-L1; P-L2 and P-L3) concurred on the high academic level at which the NC(V) programmes had been set, and reflected the advantages of studying in the NC(V) programmes:

> … *the syllabus of NC(V) becomes difficult, vocational subjects and their pass mark is 50%. The modules that are there, which are the core subjects, are based in work-related matters and unfortunately learners with Grade 12 do not know about the workplace as opposed to NC(V) students. NC(V) syllabus when they are at tertiary level becomes easier for them because they have the foundation.* (P-L1)

> *The tone, the voice, in the form of English and scope of work that is being thrown at NC(V) students, I think it's too high for them. The students have done 40% theory and 60% practical which make them competitive in the field.* (P-L2)

> *The entry requirement is too low; and the syllabus is too much for their cognitive level and the pass mark is pitched at 50%. These NC(V) graduates have been given a chance to begin their careers and need encouragement to take up NATED after NC(V) programmes because the NATED is at a higher level than the NC(V) while it broadens their minds and more learning.* (P-L3)

Even though there seem to be advantages attached to the relatively high level at which the NC(V) is pitched, this does not seem to translate into either employment opportunities or further learning pathways for the students who complete these programmes successfully. In

addition, the academic standard may be too high for many students who meet the entry requirements but fail to progress and/or complete the qualification. Thus, based on the responses received, there does not seem to be a common agreement as to what might be the appropriate level at which NC(V) programmes should be pitched.

Programme ending

Educational programmes are usually expected to create pathways for students for further studies. This does not seem to be the case in all instances within vocational institutions and programmes such as the one included in this study. In the one institution where the study was conducted, it was found that NC(V) graduates who studied Information Technology are not in a position to progress further with the programme since it does not feature in the NATED curriculum. It is unfortunate that this is also the case in other TVET colleges that offer Information Technology. The above-mentioned sentiments were echoed by participant P-G2:

> *In the college we do not have the IT after completing L4. No IT programme in*
> *the NATED.*

Therefore, graduates who completed Information Technology at level 4 (L4) of the NC(V) programme are not given the opportunity to study further than L4, which leaves them with limited future options. Some of them indicated that the only educational option open to them is to change to Business Management programmes. This situation has created a general impression of scepticism and doubt as noted by Zungu and Munakandafa (2014), whose findings indicate that a majority of their respondents cited concerns of TVET qualifications not leading anywhere; especially employment.

4.3   NC(V) employability skills

This second theme dealt with how participants responded to the questions in relation to employability skills. Categories developed from this theme include a lack of cognitive ability, skills acquisition in NC(V), the development of work-based learning, and entrepreneurship skills, as well as job search skills.

A lack of cognitive ability

Participants indicated that a lack of cognitive ability might limit a person's ability to succeed in the NC(V) programme and eventually find employment.

> *Only if maybe he or she is lacking at school like in Maths and or how to*
> *learn/study and that person didn't complete matric.* (P-G4)

> *Also the students that we register cannot cope with the content of most subjects.*
> (P-L3)

The Government Technical Advisory Committee (GTAC, 2015) reported that the NC(V) student dropout rate stood at 28% for level 2, 13% for level 3, and 10% for level 4 during 2013. The combined percentage of NC(V) students' dropout averages at 51%, which is half of the students registered within a 3-year study circle between 2011 and 2013. Even though dropout rates cannot be solely attributed to cognitive abilities, such high dropout rates do raise concerns about how students are prepared for entry into vocational programmes and their ability to succeed within these programmes.

Skills acquisition in NC(V)

Essentially, the basic reason for doing practical tasks in the class or workshop environment is to gain experience that will enhance eventual employability, but the participants painted a different picture of what happens in class. One participant summed up the experience:

> *We observe with little chance for us to work on the computer as to learn how to fix*
> *the computer.* (P-G3)

However, some skills development does seem to take place, as indicated by the following respondents:

> *… you obtain skills and qualifications which come from the theory and practical.*
> (P-G2)

> *NC(V) graduates are more advanced in terms of skills, such as computer skills*
> *and creativity compared to the equivalent level in high school.* (P-L3)

> *I observed they [the graduates] have got a lot of knowledge and also computer*
> *skills.* [P-S1]

The level of skills acquired by the NC(V) graduates does not automatically translate to employability. Had it been the case, this study would not necessarily have been worth conducting. If employment opportunities or placement for experiential training were created, it would benefit prospective employers in terms of productivity and profits. In addition, when these NC(V) graduates receive experiential training, it enhances their value of employability beyond the borders of the firms they work for, including the external labour market especially when the process involves investment in transferable skills (De Grip, Loo & Sanders, 2004).

If a particular TVET college has no capacity or is unable to provide experiences that will enhance skills development to the NC(V) graduates, it would be advisable to arrange and strive for graduates' placements within businesses or to make use of a simulated workplace area (merSETA, 2009) within the college, rather than deny graduates the opportunity to obtain such experience. Employability skills furthermore extend beyond only practical vocational skills. López, Caballero and Lampón (2012) list some of the skills that should be acquired to show employability readiness – especially when drawing up the curriculum vitae. These skills include the preparation for personal interviews, knowledge of languages, report-writing skills, and meeting protocol. In addition, Robinson (2000) emphasises that educators/lecturers should facilitate the above-mentioned employability skills through a democratic approach which would increase graduates' awareness in values, attitudes, and worker accountability.

The development of work-based learning

Lecturers and vocational institutions need to heed the call by Government as stated in the DHET Research Agenda (DHET, 2014) which proposes that partnerships between government departments and other employment stakeholders should be arranged as the TVET colleges assume the role of workplace learning environments. Work-based learning may become a viable vehicle towards employability of NC(V) graduates. Akoobhai (2015) reported that 94% of the students felt that workplace experience should be included as part of the NC(V) programme after their work-based learning experience. One of the participants commented as follows:

> *We would rather choose the NATED because they qualified with N6 plus the experience spent preparing for the trade test certificate and the experience is that it happens in real work environment where companies want to see quality production.* (P-S3)

The potential employer representatives indicated a display of separate trainings involving theory at public vocational institutions, after which the baton of training will be passed on to private or state-owned entities for practical training. The current situation at the vocational institutions exposes certain weaknesses in terms of practical experience. The DHET (2013) expressed the same view, indicating the situation as unfortunate because graduates from TVET colleges locally and nationally, as well as graduates from universities, could not be easily absorbed into the various workplaces because they lacked practical experience. The DHET's (2013) view is that workplace learning must be seen as an integral part of qualification and programme design and not a separate element. The DHET (2013) proposes that the government should make available opportunities for apprenticeships, learnerships and internships in the public service at national, provincial and municipal level, in state agencies

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such as the defence force and the police, in public educational institutions and in state-owned enterprises.

Entrepreneurship skills

Papier et al. (2012) argue that the South African education system was designed to produce job seekers rather than job creators – the so-called entrepreneurs. The vocational institutions would be best suited to deliver on such an important policy directive that encourages and supports cooperatives, small enterprises, and worker-initiated, non-governmental organisation and community training initiatives (DHET, 2011).

> *My studies would assist me to open my own company, becoming my own boss and having people work for me. As an entrepreneur, I would be able to create and design business ideas, develop items that can be sold to the public or companies and make a profit. The ISAT, which is the practical component to hone the skills required, is instead used for an examination component serving the progression purpose only.* (P-G1)

> *I wanted skills so that one day I can have my own business or my own company. Entrepreneurs are talented and innovative persons who manufacture materials, look for buyers who will buy and profit from such works. Entrepreneurs create jobs but when registered in the TVET, the skills that one aspired to obtain faded into thin air.* (P-G4)

NC(V) graduates expressed feelings of unhappiness about the manner in which NC(V) curriculum is postured. The clients (students) find it hard to gain the skills that are promised to be the core outcomes in the NC(V) curriculum. In essence, these skills are needed so that graduates are able to adapt in a variety of work environments and also to improve employment opportunities (UNESCO, 2012). Whether the skills are technical and vocational in nature or merely transferrable skills, they are important as long they are related to particular industries, jobs and vocations (Balwanz, 2015).

Job-searching skills

Of all the participants, whether graduates, lecturers or the potential employer representatives only one reflected on the issue of job-searching skills:

> *What I have done is to find recruitment agency in the Internet and post my CV.* (P-G1)

NC(V) graduates who were interviewed were doubtful about their future employment opportunities and worried about unemployment and poverty. They perceive that what is required of the NC(V) graduates' work experience is poorly communicated, and as graduates they lack the relevant direction of what they need to do and for what duration:

> *I didn't go to any institution to work and gain work experience.* (P-G5)

Gewer (2009) notes that there is a link between experiential training in the form of placement which eventually leads to employment, but he points out that TVET colleges are not the appropriate platform to assist graduates for placement.

This seeming lack of developing job search skills could be interpreted as a sign of weakness either in terms of the content and context of the curriculum, or ignorance on the side of curriculum end users. McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) suggest that graduates should work on the three sets of employment factors: individual factors (employability skills and attributes, demographics, health and well-being, job seeking skills, adaptability and mobility); personal circumstances (household circumstances, work culture, access to resources); and external factors (demand factors, enabling support factors), but it is not clear who is responsible for developing which aspect in order to assist graduates from a vocational institution towards becoming employable.

4.4 Institutional relations regarding NC(V) graduates' employability

This theme gave participants an opportunity to share their experiences with regard to institutional relations between employers and vocational institutions. From this theme the following categories developed: valuing the NC(V), poor college–industry relations, and knowledge of the employment sector.

Valuing the NC(V)
Graduates expressed disappointment at the view that the NC(V) programme is not valuable:

> *I would choose the NATED, employers do not offer in-service training for NC(V) graduates.* (P-G2)

> *Many companies recommend someone who has passed the NATED programme and are not interested in training students how to do the job.* (P-G6)

From the participants' responses provided above, it seems as if employers tend to discriminate against the NC(V) graduates in terms of offering them work placement and/or permanent work

opportunities. They are thus excluded from Anderson's (2009) productivist assumptions that training leads to productivity, and productivity leads to economic growth (training for growth); and that skills lead to employability, which in turn leads to jobs (skills for work). It seems here that prospective employers concluded that NC(V) graduates have neither been trained nor do they have the necessary skills, hence the exclusion and rejection. The prospective employers held the view that NC(V) graduates are not properly trained and therefore cannot be productive at their work stations, which affects the two other aspects, namely training for growth and skills for work.

Poor college–industry relations

Institutional relations that do not contribute to employability and employment opportunities do little to alleviate poverty and other related social ills. Some prospective employer representatives or supervisors in this study admitted that relations between themselves and the vocational institution were poor:

> *No, I think there is a gap on that area. We normally don't provide feedback, we never experienced any problem. The relationship with Dutywa campus is good but not in terms of programme specifics. We hire the Dutywa campus hall; they allow us to have students gain access to our services since it is adjacent to the clinic.* (P-S2)

> *Unfortunately, we have not had an opportunity to do that. I would say it is a natural relationship, we both benefit from each other, we do allow them to get to our high schools and display their curriculum offerings and we advise learners that they can go there in the TVET colleges to pursue skills-based careers.* (P-S3)

The employer representative respondents indicated doubts, misgivingsand insecurities which reflect what McGrath et al. (2010) reported, namely that there was wide-spread reluctance amongst employers to take in students as young as 15–17 years old for their work placement experience. However, there also seemed to be exceptions to the rule, as the following quotation indicates:

> *We provide feedback to SETAs. We have a good relationship because any time we need people maybe for food or beverages, we phone the TVET college central office and they provide quickly because they have got a database of students not working.* (P-S4)

In concluding this section, it can be confirmed and guaranteed factually that participants only participated in relationships at social and health level, meaning that no employability relations had been established between the local TVET college campus and the health department. The local Department of Basic Education shared a social and career guidance level of relationship with the local TVET college campus. In both of the above-mentioned instances as indicated, none of the relations are linked to strengthening education and training systems and the world of work advocated by the ILO (2011). The scenario further entrenches a perception that the local vocational institution and government departments have failed dismally to impart information about the NC(V) curriculum, its objective and skills acquisition or creation for graduates.

Knowledge of the employment sector

Part of the problem might also be that most of the NC(V) graduate respondents did not know their prospective employers simply because they had not had an opportunity to visit the employment sector or to meet prospective employers visiting the vocational institution. Lecturers understand the need for such a closer link between prospective employees and their potential employers (as indicated by the quote below), but it does not mean that there are enough opportunities for this interaction to happen (as the next theme indicates):

> *… learners must be able to understand what the roles that are needed within the sector by the employers are.* (P-L1)

It is not just exchange visits between vocational institutions and employers that improve employability but strengthening of what Harvey et al. (2002) propose, namely that employer inputs into course content and project work could be helpful in promoting graduates' employability. NC(V) graduates would therefore be in a better position to acquaint themselves with the institutional change in the labour market and in firm behaviour (OECD, 1996). NC(V) graduates would understand that while they received an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, employers would likewise prefer initiative, creativity, problem-solving and openness to change and would be willing to pay premiums for such skills (OECD, 1996).

The notable aspect is that the potential employers are far ahead and more knowledgeable about what happens in the industry (what is desirable), which implies that lecturers and NC(V) graduates visit the firms as outsiders ('employment refugees'). In their findings, Abas-Mastura, Imam and Osman (2013) note that employers prefer employees who possess positive attitudes and behaviours. Lecturers and NC(V) graduates are bound to enhance their relations with the main players in industry who will respond by displaying skills they prefer especially before and during recruitment (Kivinen & Silvennoinen, 2002).

4.5 Planning for employability

In this theme, participants suggested what would improve employability and employment opportunities of NC(V) graduates in the form of the following categories: broadening the NC(V) curriculum and students' placement; improving teaching within the NC(V) programmes; poor planning and participants' recommendation (course approval and programme contentment). Such an approach would be a viable strategic objective.

Broadening the NC(V) curriculum and students' placement
A wider scope of the NC(V) curriculum was noted as a pathway towards enhancing employability of NC(V) graduates. In the particular TVET college some programmes seem to be over-subscribed, which suggests a mismatch between the supply (of graduates from certain programmes) and demands from industry:

> *NC(V) should not be dismissed. Instead it should continue with more programmes being added such as basic nursing and this could allow students to have more options and be employable.* (P-L1)

> *We have students who passed HR [and] we end up letting them do cashiering duties.* (P-S4)

The view of the participant P-L1 aligns with that of McQuaid (2006) who argues that graduates can enter the workplace with the wrong skills and too little spatial mobility, leading to a spatial-skills mismatch problem. For this reason, NC(V) graduates will either remain to linger around their communities or return to the TVET colleges. This, according to Burchardt (2005), leads to early adult life often beset by frustration, disappointment and reduced confidence in the strength they would have brought into the labour market because their career aspirations have not translated into prospective employment opportunities.

Issues of broadening the NC(V) curriculum and students' placement seem to be real. Unfortunately, as identified in the literature, external factors inhibiting employment opportunities for NC(V) graduates were only partly observed: employer attitude, supply and quality of training and education, the availability of other assistance for disadvantaged job seekers, and supply of appropriate jobs in local economy (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). An employer who lacks knowledge about the NC(V) curriculum may produce a negative image about it. In brief, employers have developed less trust that NC(V) graduates are quality products, with less job-seeking assistance and irrelevant qualifications for the local economy.

Improving teaching within NC(V) programmes

Lecturers and other educators are tasked with the responsibility to impart the knowledge, and interpret the content in the textbooks and relate such information to the real world of work. One participant responded as follows to the relevant question:

> *When I teach those learners I give them practical examples of what is happening outside; in the world of work for instance that when they intend to go on a strike action they must be able to identify whether it is a legal strike or illegal strike as their subject Management Practice pertains to most labour-related matters such as the basic human rights in the workplace. (*P-L1)

Maybe giving practical examples while presenting a lesson is not enough since they are theorised with the lecturer taking centre stage. Zungu and Munakandafa (2014) advise that the lecturers in the TVET colleges should engage in active knowledge construction, which in the teaching and learning activities should help advance students' thinking that results in high quality knowledge acquisition and construction.

Poor planning

Elements of poor planning emerged in this category, as highlighted by at least one member from each group of participants, namely the graduates, lecturers and potential employer representatives (supervisors):

> *We did not have the resources.* (P-G2)

> *There were no materials to help us do practical.* (P-G3)

> *The skill and experience I received were not broad and we didn't go for practical activities like going to marketing companies.* (P-G4)

> *During my NC(V) time I didn't gain any work experience.* (P-G5)

> *Shortage of resources was the main problem and I complained about the lack of technological infrastructure time and again.* (P-L2)

> *Sometimes you hear these students complaining about lack of resources in those institutions and one would just conclude that these institutions must be better resourced.* (P-S3)

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The participants echoed Gewer's (2013) views, namely that many TVET colleges are faced with infrastructural and resource challenges which have a direct impact on the delivery of practical skills in the workshops. There are limited or no resources and little practical training, thus graduates are compelled to exit without the required practical knowledge. To rectify the situation, strong leadership, good governance and focused management are needed. These three elements will ensure institutional compliance with system oversight, quality, efficiency and sustainability during the process of implementing strategy (Muswaba, 2012).

Participants' recommendation (course approval and programme contentment)
The NQF L4 may be viewed as a non-qualification certificate since it is difficult for employers to recognise it. One participant commented as follows:

> *What I think could be done is to make provision for these students to obtain the trade test certificates themselves from institutions themselves. (P-S3)*

The DoE (2008) disagrees with the above-mentioned participant's view and instead suggests that TVET colleges must be supported by making available appropriate infrastructure, equipment and ICT. They must also have strong linkages with industry that support workplace opportunities for students to gain the necessary work experience as part of their qualification requirements.

4.6 Role of government in NC(V) employability

The participants' responses indicate that public servants of several departments in government do not have thorough knowledge of what NC(V) is about and its objectives. The following categories developed from the above-mentioned theme: creating awareness of NC(V) programmes; post establishment; professional ethical conduct; underdevelopment and poverty as social ills; delegation of duties; policy initiative; and quiet diplomacy.

Creating awareness of NC(V) programmes
In this category, participants' responses reflected their appeals to Government to create NC(V) awareness among the public, as articulated by participant P-L2:

> *Government should organise sort of seminars to create awareness about the NC(V) programme to the public of what is entailed in this programme because as things stand the awareness is poor. Government should invite all the relevant stakeholders whereby those employers are going to tell what is expected of the students when they graduate. (P-L2)*

In such seminars, as suggested by P-L2, Government would be able to address some of the criticism levelled against the NC(V) programmes, such as the following:

- The duration of study is too long (one year per level) compared to the occupational programmes (three to six months per level).
- Learnerships and apprenticeships emphasise practical application while the NC(V) pays substantial attention to theory and excludes appropriate time to application and experience in the workplace.

The qualification is pitched too high and Grade 9s drop out in the first year or fail at level 2. Grades 11 and 12 perform much better on the NC(V) – but they must go back to level 2 and start again.

- The programme is not adequately resourced to ensure learner success.
- Most colleges lack adequate resources, for example, well-resourced workshops and simulation rooms, and experienced, qualified lecturers, hence compromising the quality of teaching and learning.
- Most students, especially in the engineering programmes, must make do without the benefit of proper practical instruction and work experience; therefore, they do not develop the necessary vocational skills for employment.
- Although NC(V) qualifications lead to higher education, in reality, NC(V) graduates are unable to compete with school graduates for the limited space at universities.
- NC(V) graduates with their limited skills must compete with better skilled apprentices (artisans) and learners (artisans) for employment (Roopnarain, 2015).

All the above-mentioned shortcomings have made the NC(V) curriculum unpopular. A need to reverse the negativity of the issues raised above should become the DHET and government's priority as initiators of the programme, but not to the exclusion of other important stakeholders such as academics and researchers. Damage control would eventually add to the strategies as advocated in the literature review (Chapter 2) of this study.

Post establishment

Some of the potential employer representative participants in this study pointed out why there is an inability to establish new posts. They (supervisors) described the difficulties facing Government in attempting to introduce new positions and explained that the matter is exacerbated because there are no immediate solutions to create new sustainable jobs:

We had a situation in the department where we didn't have funding for the new posts and only replaced those who passed on, got a post somewhere, retired or resigned, of which on advertising the post, it states clearly the qualifications required, duties to be performed and approval if it's a post that needs registration by authority. Furthermore, requirements start from Grade 12 with the relevant qualifications in, for example, HR or finance and at times with relevant experience in the health field. (P-S2)

The department was not in a position to employ for a reason of budgetary constraints. We had posts for works inspectors; we needed people who have got skills around construction. (P-S3)

Even if government departments were in a position to establish new work positions, it would still be difficult for NC(V) graduates to find employment opportunities due to their limited work experience while at the college. In this regard, Wolf (2011) states that most colleges have limited access to workplaces for school leavers, which restricts their preparation for the workplace. This was found to be a significant determinant of employability. A solution to this challenge would be to create tripartite relations between colleges (suppliers of labour), potential employment and Government to engage around access to workplaces for experiential learning.

Professional ethical conduct

Issues of professional conduct were raised in this study. One participant severely criticised NC(V) lecturers:

NC(V) teachers need to be taught or need to be workshopped about how they could assist us academically because they are the ones who discouraged us during recruitment. (P-G3)

In light of the above, it could be perceived as professional offence and unethical for a lecturer/educator to provide misleading information to a student whose future relies on such assistance to choose the correct career path. The statement quoted above indicates an institutional gap in terms of induction and career guidance, and a vacuum between the South African Council of Educators and lecturers. Tailor (2011), who identified some weakness within the education system, advocates for proficiency tests devised for every job that would be applied strictly in recruiting and promoting staff for all positions in the public service.

Penetrating assessment has found the lack of technical knowledge in both the classroom and administrative spheres to be a source of inefficiency and conduct (Tailor, 2011).

Underdevelopment and poverty as social ills

Twenty-two years after the democratic dispensation, in areas such as the town of Dutywa, rural development is still nothing more than a pipe dream. One participant spoke negatively about the situation. Most people tend to ignore the problem, or act as if it does not exist, but the reality is that poverty is observable and can be seen around the areas in which citizens live. Two of the participants commented as follows:

> *Problem is that there are no information technology companies or firms around Dutywa Town. Students fail to gain access to higher education because at home parents do not have money for the university studies and/or if that person didn't complete matric.* (P-G2)

> *There is a high rate of unemployment and people are living beyond the poverty line.* (P-S2)

Watters (2008) states that time has stood still for many people living in rural areas; there may be more houses with electricity, running water, and schools might have more text books, but essentially day-to-day living has remained unchanged. This is also true for the area where this study was conducted. With all the long awaited changes including democracy in 1994 that emerged in South Africa, to this day what most of the people living in rural areas will ever say is the change in political will (Watters, 2008). Although the following questions fall outside the scope of this study, they might help to highlight roles and responsibilities: Whose duty is it to build industry/firms where TVET college graduates would find employment? Whose duty is it to develop a rural town into a city that will cater for its rural citizens? Whose duty is it to establish farmers and entrepreneurs that will create jobs?

Besides strategies to improve employability (see Chapter 2), such as identifying employability stakeholders; incorporating technology into the NC(V) curriculum; establishing volunteerism; and encouraging self-employment, other aspects such as diverting weaknesses into strength would be helpful in the fight to enhance employability. Vocational institutions and Government should build a sense of independence amongst students ensuring that resources are made available that can encourage self-employment and volunteerism.

Delegation of duties

Officials working with students would be able to observe challenges students are encountering if ever they engaged with them on a daily basis. With Work Placement Officer (WPO) and Student Support Services (SSS) Officer executing totally different tasks, it derails the motive of placement in the case WPO works far from graduates. The WPO is based at the central administrative office and his/her duties are specifically to look for graduates' work experience placement. The duty of the SSS, who is based in the campuses, is to support students by assisting them with registration, extra-mural activities and academic activities such as extra classes and remedial classes. The SSS cannot play a role in graduates' work placement. One of the participants commented as follows:

> *The learners need to go for practical training; the work placement officer will speak to that particular business employer and as per request the SSS officer will send that information to the WPO to accommodate them for the training.* (P-L1)

The DHET (2013) acknowledges that some colleges do offer support through the SSS such as academic support, social support, bursaries, assisting students to complete their programmes of study, and assistance with finding workplaces for the practical components of their programmes and jobs on completion of their studies. Hence, the issue of helping students find placement should be commended as a positive move. However, this is not the case with NC(V), as participants indicated in their response. Again, the WPO is misplaced because at the central office, he/she only receives information of students without getting in touch with the graduates.

Policy initiatives

None of the government departments and private sector employers indicated at any stage of the interviews that they sometimes open up job opportunities for the NC(V) graduates, hence the participants' response in this regard looked dubious except that participant P-L2 highlighted in his response a policy initiative matter.

> *Every government institution should be forced to take a number of NC(V) graduates to actually employ some of them as part of their intake on a year-to-year basis and also that government should be the first to identify capability of their students.* (P-L2)

> *It would be better to employ both whether NC(V) or NATED as long as each individual is good at her work. We don't have much in terms of staffing. That also makes us sceptical to choose these are the type we can employ and it becomes very difficult to say maybe we need NQF level so much.* (P-S2)

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The intention of DHET (2013) of creating a stronger and more cooperative relationship between education and training institutions and the workplace, appears to be a positive move but the reality is that it is difficult to find workplaces for the NC(V) graduates. The benefits of a post-school education and training system that is responsive to the needs of individual citizens and of employers both in the public and private sectors, as well as broader societal and developmental objectives, remain no more than an ideal.

4.7. Responses of NC(V) graduates to their unemployment

This theme was intended to reveal how graduate participants reacted regarding their experience of employability. From the theme the categories that developed are NC(V) graduates' disgruntlement, demotivation and discouragement; self-quiz, self-discovery and future endeavours; encouraging and consolation employability factors; and students' conduct.

NC(V) graduates' disgruntlement, demotivation and discouragement
Out of frustration, after a gruelling journey of completing the NC(V) programme, condemnation could just be one method by which graduates' attempt to deal with their emotions. There appear to be no signs that NC(V) graduates have an equal chance of employment opportunities since the inception of the programme. All the responses given by graduate participants suggest that they feel they are doomed to failure. They pin their hopes on returning to the vocational institutions to register for the NATED programmes as the only means of survival. Graduates expressed anger towards the system and curriculum leading, as is shown in the quotes below:

> *For a person to go there it is a waste of time* and *you spend three years doing something that is not recognised by department and companies*. Officials in the department say *I'm not qualified to be employed by the department because I'm having Grade 12.* (P-G1)

> *I won't encourage anyone who passed Grade 12 to enrol for the NC(V)*. (P-G3)

> *I didn't see any opportunities.* (P-G4)

> *I realised that there is no much of job opportunities available for people who have completed NC(V) L4.* (P-G5)

> *I didn't see any opportunities; there are fewer adverts indicating L4 qualifications.* (P-G6)

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From the NC(V) graduates' own observations and the trends in job advertisements there does not seem to be much interest in terms of making advertisements with L4 qualifications. This view contrasts with Green et al.'s (2005) claim that the lack of interest in L4 qualifications is the result of segmented housing markets, poor public transport links and lack of access to private transport exacerbating low morale and inability to travel to employment. Generally, advertisements mostly display minimum requirements as a diploma qualification which highlights the fact that NC(V) graduates possess the lowest of qualifications, the NQF exit L4 qualification.

Self-reflection, self-discovery and future endeavours

It was interesting to observe how one graduate participant did introspection and the other graduate participants including the lecturer participant (P-L1) gave reasons for encouraging and returning to the vocational institution to register for the NATED programme:

> *How am I going to get a job?* (P-G1)

> *I wanted to gain further knowledge and to improve my qualification but besides that I would encourage other people because if you are struggling to get matric or if you have not gone to high school in your lifetime NC(V) is the best thing.* (P-G5)

> *I would like to study further and complete a degree.* (P-G6)

> *The reason why I encourage those L4 students to register for NATED is that they should have the L4 and a diploma in order to improve their employment opportunities.* (P-L1)

McGrath et al. (2010) evaluated lecturers and suggested that they should act as brokers or facilitators of social capital networks, which implies that they must link their students with local employers and former graduates who are currently employed. The NC(V) graduate returnees to the college were extremely inspired to enhance their own employability status by registering for the NATED programmes which in their view weigh up above the NC(V) programmes, hence their decision to return to the same campus to further their studies. This view was boosted because lecturers encouraged these NC(V) graduates to register for the NATED programmes after completing the L4.

Encouraging employability factors

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While the notion exists that the NC(V) curriculum was established to reduce the skills gap in South Africa, a vacuum has been created for graduates completing six years of what they feel is a better academic reward, a diploma (three years to complete NC(V) programme with Integrated Summative Assessment Tasks (ISATs), the practical component plus 18 months NATED programme with additional 18 months of experiential training):

> *You have that positive mind that when I get here may be there might be a department or company that will employ me while on the other hand one of my friends has done IT, which was why it kept me going.* (P-G1)

> *It's easy for you to be employed and the doors are wide open for those people who are doing NATED.* (P-G3)

> *I would encourage someone to enrol for the NATED programme because at the end they could get a permanent job and also that they can qualify to go to the university.* (P-G4)

> *I enrolled for NATED because there are few subjects that you do so I assumed that it is easy than NC(V) programme.* (P-G5)

> *There are so many opportunities that you could get a job when you have a diploma.* (P-G6)

> *That learner may undergo the NC(V) programme whereby she can get the foundation of marketing programme.* (P-L1)

None of the NC(V) graduates made positive comments about the NC(V) qualification. They applauded the prospect that the diploma qualification – obtained after completion of 18 months' theoretical and 18 months' experiential training – is the only meaningful direction towards first-time job acquisition (employability). Based on the literature review (see, for instance, McGrath & Akoojee, 2009) the NC(V) curriculum is seen as of low quality and low status. Consequently, employers, Government and the public alike have developed a negative perception of these vocational programmes.

In sum: based on the literature and the lecturer participants' responses it is clear that confusion has been created over time because the NC(V) curriculum has been pitched too high in terms of quality while the same qualification is rated low or the least in the employment sector. A policy review in terms of the minimum job requirements seems to be necessary.

Students' conduct

Employment institutions, including Government, spoke well of the conduct of graduates of the NATED programmes from this vocational institution. However, nothing has been said about the NC(V) graduates since the potential employers did not offer the NC(V) graduates experiential training:

> *We usually have a written document to their campus informing them of their conduct.* (P-S1)

Roopnarain (2015) suggests that work-integrated learning is a means to strengthen the colleges and the NC(V) programmes. This could be achieved by aligning the NC(V) curriculum more closely to the needs of industry and establishing college–industry partnerships (Roopnarain, 2015). Such partnerships would allow students to visit the industry site and the industry players to visit the vocational institutions so as to engage in oral feedback including measures to correct any wrongs.

4.8 Summary

This chapter provided a broader perspective on the presentation and discussion of results and findings from the participants' interviews. Its focus was on the development of six themes, namely knowledge and understanding of the NC(V) programme; NC(V) employability skills; institutional relations regarding NC(V) graduates' employability; planning for employability; the role of government in NC(V) employability; and reactionary behaviour of NC(V) graduates.

From the themes, the findings show that NC(V) graduates cannot boast of any skills acquisition. Furthermore, there is no evidence of relations between vocational institutions and the employment industry; TVET colleges are marred by poor planning; there is very little awareness about the NC(V) curriculum and its objective; and employability stakeholders are dissatisfied. In the next and final chapter, attention is given to the four implications involving the theory, policy, practice and future research projects as direct result of the generated data from the interviews.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1   Introduction

In this chapter, the study concludes with how the following three research sub-questions have been answered:

- How do NC(V) graduates from three selected programmes perceive their employment opportunities prior to their enrolment in a NATED programme?
- How do lecturers in the selected programmes view their ability to promote the employability of NC(V) graduates?
- How do the employment criteria of potential employers of NC(V) graduates align with the NC(V) graduate outcomes in selected programmes?

The answers to these sub-questions serve as background to answering the following main research question:

How do stakeholders perceive the employability of NC(V) graduates from a Technical and Vocational Education and Training college?

This chapter also explores the possible implications of the findings for theory, policy and practice, as well as for future research.

5.2   Conclusions

Findings as noted in the previous chapter show that prospective NC(V) students enter into the vocational system of education without understanding the fundamental objective of the different NC(V) programmes, future aspirations, and career path choices. The prospective NC(V) students who participated in the study indicated that they initially considered the NC(V) programmes as a lifeline to employability, but that these perceptions changed after enrolment due to aspects of social acceptability of the programmes in the industry. In the wake of programme completion, no link has been developed for NC(V) graduates transforming into employees or job trainees of the relevant industry. This state of affairs has led to most graduates opting for the less fancied NATED programme offered within the TVET sector. NC(V) graduates have developed a negative attitude towards the NC(V) programmes as the certificates obtained after completion of the exit level seem only to direct graduates towards

further studies with minimal chances of gaining admission into universities and employment opportunities.

NC(V) graduates were distraught because they felt that the system had let them down. They reluctantly accepted that the NC(V) programmes did not address their social plight by helping to improve unemployment figures, which are also high in the context where the study was conducted. Prospective employers were seemingly not prepared to offer them an opportunity to perform through experiential training. The TVET college NC(V) graduate participants received no assistance in terms of placement opportunities as were offered to NATED graduates, hence they opted to re-enrol for the NATED programmes after completion of the NC(V). There were not sufficient resources or a period that could be used for practical tasks, which put graduates under a great deal of undue pressure since they were fully aware that prospective employers expected graduates to possess a certain level of skills and experience accumulated during practical periods. NC(V) graduates who completed NQF L4 took up an initiative to indirectly enhance their own employability status by way of returning to the college and registering for the NATED programme since they felt it would put them on a better footing than NC(V) graduates without the NATED qualification.

Lecturers and potential employers alike acknowledged that relations between industry and the vocational institution were poor. They also felt that not enough efforts were made to develop institutional relations first with the aim of enticing employers to hire NC(V) graduates or even to offer them placement opportunities. The potential employers lacked insight into the context and detailed content of NC(V) programmes, and that government did not seem to know of the NC(V) curriculum exited. The perception that the NC(V)'s vocational subjects have been pitched too high, which is similar to a finding made by Roopnarain (2015), was acknowledged as a real situation. Further condemnation of the NC(V) programme lay in the fact that graduates felt it necessary to enrol for the NATED programme after completion of the NC(V). They saw this as the only way to broaden their knowledge and skills to meet the requirements of industry.

Employers observed and acknowledged that their level of knowledge about the NC(V) was limited. Although potential employers observed and confirmed the NC(V) graduates' computer skills, only the NATED programme's graduates were praised about possessing such skills. This led to bias in terms of who receives experiential training. The prospective employers indicated that the skills acquired by NC(V) graduates did not translate into a good employer–vocational institution relationship and, if such a relationship did occur, it was not linked to the employability of NC(V) graduates. Besides poor institutional relations, employers had a

particular preference as they advertised posts from NQF L5 or L6 and beyond, which is a level above that of the NC(V) L4 certificate. A moratorium on new jobs worsened the situation due to budgetary constraints and government offices in the area were not able to advertise new posts.

Smith et al. (2000) observed that graduates from poor backgrounds were unable to find appropriate employment after graduation. Students join TVET colleges on the basis that the TVET colleges provide NSFAS bursaries. Wang (2013) found that exclusion, inequality and deprivation manifest in an educational/vocational and socio-economic systems, and thus hamper the development of employability. Students' socio-economic status in the particular setting might be the contributing factor to their unemployment. The NC(V) graduates interviewed in this study lacked the knowledge, skills and competencies embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being and lead to employability (as defined by the OECD, 2001). The absence of NC(V) graduates' employability negatively affects the purpose of what TVET colleges were designed for, that is to close the skills gap in South Africa and to provide human capital as required by the industry (Tikly, 2013).

5.3 POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS

The four possible implications discussed below are the theory implications, policy implications, implications for practice, and future research implications.

5.3.1   Implications for theory

Employability is aimed at ensuring graduates' knowledgeability, skilfulness, and competence so that in the end their personal, social and economic well-being could improve as advocated by human capital theory (OECD, 2001; also see Chapter 2, 2.4 par.6 of this thesis). Such a notion of employability means that it enables graduates to thrive within the country where they will be engaged in appropriate and relevant work with which they can identify, and which has the potential for future well-being and life enhancement (Walker, 2003). However, the NC(V) graduates who participated in this study did not experience well-being and life enhancement, as a result of what Wang (2013) refers to as exclusion, inequality and deprivation which manifest from a system marked by constraint of employability. The data in this study showed that employers would rather employ NATED graduates since it is the same programme they followed at college days. Furthermore, lecturers are influential in promoting NATED programmes as the 'employability saviour'. Since no learnerships and/or apprenticeships exist

that would channel energies of NC(V) graduates into acquiring the most needed skills, there is the further danger of entrenching poverty, a direct opposite of what the HCT and the CA intended to achieve.

Holden & Biddle (2016) proposed to list education as an investment in man and any attainment to that effect becomes a capital, and that was how they called the theory human capital. The formation of NC(V) programme meant that government had a vision to invest after which it would receive returns by way of utilizing the knowledge and skills NC(V) graduates would have obtained on completion of the programmes. Of grave concern is that govern has not spoken, articulated and promoted the NC(V) programmes as means to provide the industry and business role players with enough skilled workforce which created doubt to the sector. This failure or lack of blockade the good intentions of the human capital theory in creating a growing economy that would provide South Africans especially the youth to whom NC(V) programmes were envisioned to keep them to normal living standards.

On observation of how the HCT and CA were constructed, rural areas were shown to be dysfunctional, underdeveloped environments. It was obvious that TVET colleges emulate such situational setups. A new, accessible NC(V) curriculum was subsequently designed and it reflected the state's revived developmental framework which sought to prepare young persons more effectively to be employable in a sustainable manner (Gewer, 2009). Therefore, to create jobs and consequently to achieve employability, Government needs to commit to supporting the economy so that the country performs and competes well in the global economy (Maree, 2007).

The CA has been honoured with a special role in the society and other sectors of the country. The CA has according to Clark (2006) been used to investigate poverty, inequality, well-being, social justice, gender, social exclusion, health, disability, child poverty and identity. All these aspects as advocated by the CA, are inclined to the implementation of the constitutional imperatives. Based on the evidence that the syllabus of NC(V) is difficult, vocational subjects and their pass mark pitched at 50% (see PL-3 response, p.58 of Chapter 4) more than their counterparts is tantamount academic inequality for students learning in the same environment. Another piece of evidence points at how NC(V) graduates are not afforded an opportunity to prove through employability what they have been learning in the three years at the TVET College and this is similar to social exclusion. Clark (2006) supports the view that micro level policy action places focus on selecting beneficiaries for public works programmes, welfare payments or microfinance projects. Government has got the public works programmes; it

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would be applaudible it these NC(V) graduates could be placed in such programmes to earn a salary to reduce poverty.

Part of what life demands from people is about making choices. NC(V) graduates have on a number of occasions made such choices including enrolling for the NC(V) programmes as well as choosing to return to the vocational institution and register for the Nated programmes. The SIT became relevant in that NC(V) graduates wanted to belong, to improve their employability and look to the future with obtaining knowledge and skills from the vocational institution. Some NC(V) graduates, participant (P-G4) had developed an attitude towards NC(V) curriculum such that they would never encourage anyone to take up the programme. According to Piderit (2000), those NC(V) graduates who would never encourage other students took up the position of resistance which is one category of SIT. The above is indicative of how the NC(V) graduates have been emotionally affected by the circumstances from the programmes they have chosen but unfortunately could not turn the hands of time.

5.3.2   Implications for policy

Apart from technical glitches of scepticism towards offering NC(V) graduates employment opportunities, which shows that graduates whether from the NC(V) or the NATED should be judged based on their performance, findings suggested that every government institution be forced to take a number of NC(V) graduates to employ some of them as part of their intake on a year-to-year basis, and also that the government should be the first to identify these students' capability. Therefore, it is suggested that policy formulators reconsider how NC(V) graduates can possibly be absorbed into the industry without being hindered by other external employability factors.

The South African Department of Trade and Industry's growth strategy for the country includes a focus on broadening participation, equity and access to redress for all economic citizens, particularly those previously marginalised (DTI, 2007b). However, the findings of this study suggest that these policy goals have not been met in the particular context where the study was conducted. In order to enhance NC(V) graduates' employability, it is suggested that the companies and businesses in the Amathole District Municipality that are interested in doing business with the government should at least have NC(V) graduates in their employ. This gesture would go a long way in ensuring that NC(V) graduates find employment opportunities locally than having to relocate to far-flung provinces of the country.

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According to the government, lecturers are at the centre of almost all the educational activities in institutions that offer TVET education; therefore, sufficiently and appropriately qualified and competent lecturers who understand and have expertise in both the academic and work-related dimensions of TVET are needed if the institutions that offer TVET programmes are to make the critical contribution expected of them (DHET, 2013). Mokone (2011) contends that TVET colleges do not have enough lecturers who have the capacity to take charge of teaching and learning situations. The data in my study suggest that the lecturers interviewed did not have an adequate understanding of what the NC(V) qualification entails, and therefore had a limited capacity to engage with prospective employers or students on the matter. Employers' representatives also did not have an adequate understanding of what the NC(V) prepares graduates and potential employees for. They also did not participate in preparing NC(V) graduates for the workplace or in the development of the NC(V) curriculum so that it becomes responsive to the needs of their companies. Clarke (1997) emphasised the importance of close cooperation and collaboration between educators, employers and Government so as to assist in developing relevant teaching and training programmes that seek to serve the needs of communities.

In the NATED programmes students study theory subjects for 18 months and do experiential workplace learning for another 18 months to obtain the diploma qualification. This does not apply to NC(V) programmes. Based on this study, it is suggested that NC(V) graduates be placed in an experiential learning situation similar to that of NATED programmes (18–24 months) in an attempt to address the issues raised above.

The NC(V) was furthermore developed to explicitly recognise that students bring diverse interests, talents, and future directions with them into the college setting, and to acknowledge the different academic starting points of students. Balwanz (2015) indicates that the NC(V) provides a more flexible curriculum than the NSC, while also emphasising the development of foundational skills. Data from the participants suggest that Government should induce every department and other parastatals to make it their responsibility to employ NC(V) graduates either as work placements, internships and/or apprenticeships. The challenge is the minimum requirement for employment whereby candidates have to produce matric plus three years to qualify for job interviews. Below that, a candidate does not qualify and since NC(V) graduates with NQF L4 certificates possess only a certificate equivalent to Grade 12, they stand no chance of finding jobs. It may be helpful to categorise an assortment of jobs suitable for NC(V) graduates. Although it seems difficult, through policy-making processes a perfect solution might be found.

The context within which the graduate participants had chosen to follow the NC(V) programme shows their willingness to succeed academically at whatever cost. Their aim was to improve their social standing by first completing the NC(V) programme, which is a qualification equivalent to Grade 12. Now these students do not only need to perform better or become academically successful, but they also face the economic challenge of employability. Their employability reduces the scourge of poverty and inequality, and contributes to human development and increased well-being which is the foundation of the CA (Clark, 2006). Their persistent move to register for the 18 months NATED programme after three years in the NC(V) programme shows their determination to eradicate poverty and inequality from their lives. However, so far their efforts have been in vain. Findings in this study emphasise the importance of creating an enabling environment for the enhancement of entrepreneurial skills and job search skills which, in light of employability, is viewed as a positive step in eradicating the scourge of poverty.

In closing this section on policy implications, I wish to bring to the attention of government on how best NC(V) graduates could be put into good use. As an example, the RDP of 1994 (RDP, 1994), in the form of short questions: who build those low cost houses? Who electrified those houses? Who did plumbing duties in those houses? Already the project in its form integrates three vocational occupations. From these questions, one would suggest without a doubt that in the three years that NC(V) graduates spent at TVET Colleges, they must have obtained knowledge and skills not only to do the handiwork but also to start own companies and corporate formations.

5.3.3   Implications for practice

The vocational education system is aimed at producing employment seekers and if jobs do not ensue, it creates a negative perception for the NC(V) graduates. Gewer (2009) argues that TVET colleges are not the appropriate platform for graduates' placement opportunities which are deemed necessary for experiential training, the foremost aspect that leads to employment. Placement for NC(V) graduates would serve as tangible or concrete proof that the graduates have gained experience but the industry where they need to be placed has existing and confirmed issues with the NC(V) programme. In this study, it was found that most departments are not aware, lack the knowledge and understanding of what NC(V) is about, and stand in the way of graduates because potential employers doubt that NC(V) graduates are employable. With assistance from lecturers, NC(V) graduates should guard against underselling themselves to potential employers (Cryer, 1997). NC(V) graduates need to

produce skills such as communication and interpersonal relations acquired during their time at the college.

McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) name employer attitudes as one of the external factors that minimise the employment opportunities of NC(V) graduates. The current study has found that potential employers provided enough evidence that support preference in the NATED programme graduates to the NC(V) graduates. As indicated before, NATED programmes are theory-based, while the practical part is completed in the workplace, monitored by potential employers. The approach is different in the NC(V) programmes where the practical part is done in the class, or in the workshop of a TVET college and is monitored by lecturers. According to Peddle (2000), employers allege that educational institutions are not in a position to develop graduates' employability skills suitably. TVET colleges will need to win the confidence of society and the public by building capacity of graduates.

5.3.4   Implications for future research

This study was conducted at a campus of a particular TVET college. The data that was collected came from a limited number of participants since the main focus of this study was NC(V) graduates who reconsidered registering in the NATED programmes, those lecturers who headed the three NC(V) programmes, and selected employers' representatives or supervisors. Future research could explore avenues by which to introduce alternative NC(V) programmes, in other words, other than the current three available programmes. After a thorough feasibility study and consultation with stakeholders including parents, students, lecturers and prospective employers, it could be considered to remove the current programmes and replace them with those that will cater for the local labour market. The idea to retain a programme like Information Technology while there is not even a single company around the rural town where the study was conducted is not of any use. Programmes such as Community Safety that may cater for or supply the local police force with interns; Financial Management to cater for the local banks and government departments, and Farming Management seem to be relevant since the area in which the study was conducted has economic viability suited to the environment and local labour market.

The participants' responses indicated that there seem to be limited linkages between vocational and employer institutions. Vocational institutions are not well informed about the needs of the local labour market, while the employment institutions do not assist vocational institutions with information regarding how they can contribute positively to the NC(V) curriculum for the benefit of NC(V) graduates. Therefore, future research could investigate

how the cooperation between vocational and employment institutions could be nurtured to foster the employability of NC(V) graduates. Issues of employer attitudes should not be excluded from such a study since part of the evidence singled out employer attitudes as a factor contributing to minimal employability prospects of NC(V) graduates.

In this study, NC(V) graduates, institutions of vocational education as represented by lecturers, and the employment sector as represented by employers' supervisors are viewed as the main contributors to employability. Future research could complement the matter of employability by introducing parents as another fundamental pillar of employability. When graduates are still trying to find employment, parents provide funds for transport and subsistence and are thus vital in helping graduates cope with unemployment. Currently not much is known about how parents view the educational choices and employability prospects of their children.

5.4   Summary

This study has shown that the NC(V) graduates' employability prospects within one rural context are poor. The NC(V) graduates seem to be stuck in a position of hopelessness where they cannot find any assistance towards employability, whether from their lecturers, vocational institutions, or potential employers. On the part of the NC(V) graduates, registering in the NATED programme after completion of the NC(V) programme shows determination to succeed, striving for independence and a desire to contribute to future personal development and economic growth.

The discussion in the sections above include implications for theory, policy, practice and future research aimed at making suggestions that may be followed up to achieve the employability of NC(V) graduates. Discussion of theories and approaches was focused on improving the vocational institutions and general well-being of graduates. Current policy positions seem to have yielded little positive results for the NC(V) graduates included in this study, since there is no indication that job creation or more job opportunities will be achieved in the near future.

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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITEIT·STELLENBOSCH·UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

<mark>SU-HSD-002615</mark>

Title: **An exploration of stakeholder perceptions of the employability of National Certificate (Vocational) graduates**.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Nduvazi Obert Mabunda**, **for the programme Master of Philosophy in Lifelong Learning** from the **Faculty of Education** at Stellenbosch University. **The results of this study will be contributed to the thesis or mini dissertation**. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because **you are a stakeholder in the employment sector as a graduate/lecturer/employer**. **Your perceptions about employability will give light to the researcher on how possible employability of NC(V) graduates can be enhanced.**

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to investigate how stakeholders can contribute in the enhancement of NC(V) graduates' employability. The study also makes suggestions with which government can work on to improve the employability of these NC(V) graduates.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

- **You will sign the consent form to participate in the research study.**
- **You will meet with the researcher the week before the scheduled interview for debriefing (on the 15th August 2016).**
- **During the meeting, you will get an opportunity to ask questions of clarity about the study, its purpose, its findings and policy suggestions.**
- **You will partake in the research interview on the week ending 19th August 2016.**

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- **The interview will take up to the maximum of one hour while you will be answering the already prepared questions regarding the topic of research.**
- **The audio-tape will be used to capture some of your responses while other information of your responses will be captured by hand into the scribing book.**
- **After the interviews, you will be given the opportunity to observe your own responses immediately the research study is nearly about to be completed.**

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

If during the interview, participants may feel emotional about their experiences, the interview may be kept on suspense temporarily for some few minutes, until the participants have calmed down and ready to continue with the interview.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

As this study is for personal growth and academic achievement, participants should be aware of the fact that there are no material possessions to be given and/or monitory benefits that will be awarded to participants. Towards the end of the study, suggestions will be made as to how to enhance employability which in turn will become policy matter that may be implemented by government.

Other prominent researchers may utilize this study as the foundation to expand, compare and contrast the findings in this study with the sister campuses of Dutywa Campus, King Hintsa TVET College and other colleges within the Eastern Cape Province as well as extend it to other colleges from the remaining eight provinces.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Be informed that participation is voluntary and there are no monitory benefits since this study is not commissioned by business but done on the basis or purpose of an individual and personal achievement for the researcher.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. **Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using codes that will describe the type of participant such as P-S1, P-L1 and/or P-G1. All the**

materials used in the collection of data will be kept in my room, on shelves which I use alone.

My study supervisor, Stellenbosch University and government are the only 3ʳᵈ party to get hold or gain access to data as required by law. Part of the interview will be audio taped. The data collected through audio recording will be kept under my supervision for 12 months after which it will be deleted because the study will have been completed.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. **As the study is an academic activity, professionalism needs to be maintained at all times. It is expected that participants may not reveal to non-participants any activity or information regarding the study. In revealing such information, the conduct will be dimmed unethical and unprofessional, therefore it may warrant withdrawal of participants without further notice.**

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Dr BL Frick: My Supervisor.

Tel: 021 808 3807

Faculty of Education

Private Bag X1

MATIELAND

7602

9.   RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your

participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me by **Nduvazi Obert Mabunda** in English and I am in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to me. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Subject/Participant

_____

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

_____   _____

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative   Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____. He/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX B

KING HINTSA
TVET COLLEGE

Tel : +27 47 401 6400
Fax : +27 47 401 6430
Email: info@kinghintsacollege.edu.za

Ref. Mr B.E. Mhlaba – DP Academic

From: Office of the Principal

To: Mr N.O Mabunda

Date: 13 April 2016

With reference to your correspondence requesting permission to access College sites to pursue research studies.

The College has decided to grant you a permission to conduct your research studies in any of the four campuses and with all stakeholders of the institution as long as it is not going to be disturbing Teaching and Learning Process. It is the College's objective to promote capacity development to our staff members.

The College wishes you all the best and success in your endeavours.

Date: 13/04/2016

Miss N. Balfour

The College Principal

KHC-0-Academic – Letter to Mabunda   BM/lm   Page 1

APPENDIX C

Province of the

EASTERN CAPE

EDUCATION

Public Works Premises Education 419 Railway Road* Private Bag X1203* Dutywa*5000*

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA*Tel: +0474892247/5000 Fax:+ 0474891028
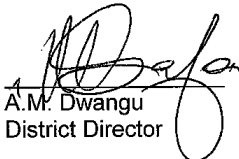
Enquiries: A.M. Dwangu   Date: 23 October 2015

TO	: MR NDUVAZI OBERT MABUNDA
FROM	: DISTRICT DIRECTOR
SUBJECT	: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH –NDUVAZI OBERT MABUNDA
DATE	: 22 MARCH 2016

Kindly be advised that Mr Nduvazi Obert Mabunda has been granted permission to conduct a research in your school in pursuance of his studies towards a Master of Philosophy in life Long Learning student at Stellenbosch University.

Your anticipated co-operation with him is appreciated in advance.

Yours truly

A.M. Dwangu
District Director
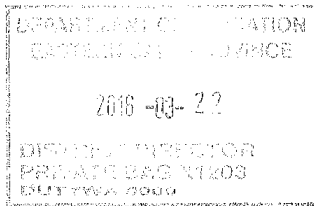
building blocks for growth

APPENDIX D

Province of the
EASTERN CAPE
HEALTH

Office of the Sub – District Manager: Mbhashe Sub- District • 307 Charlotte Street • Dutywa •
Private Bag X1232 • Dutywa •5000 • REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
Tel.: +27 (0)47 489 1223• Fax: +27 (0)47 489 1224• Cell 0605446364
Email danjiswa.nyengule@impilo.ecprov.go.za • Enquires Mrs D Nyengule

To: N.O. Mabunda
King Hintsa TVET College
Dutywa Campus
PO Box 215
DUTYWA
5000

Dear Mr. Mabunda

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY 2016

This serves to respond to your correspondence wherein you were requesting permission to do a research study on **'Exploration of stakeholder perceptions of the employability of NC(V) graduates'** who might be within the Department of Health. The permission is granted provided there are such graduates who are from the above mentioned institution and the study will not divulge any confidential information that is of the Department to third parties.

Hoping that you will cooperate with the requirements of the Department

Thank you

D. Nyengule   15/04/2016
SUB-DISTRICT MANAGER

United in achieving quality health care for all

Fraud prevention line: 0800 701 701
24 hour Call Centre: 0800 032 364
Website: www.ecdoh.gov.za
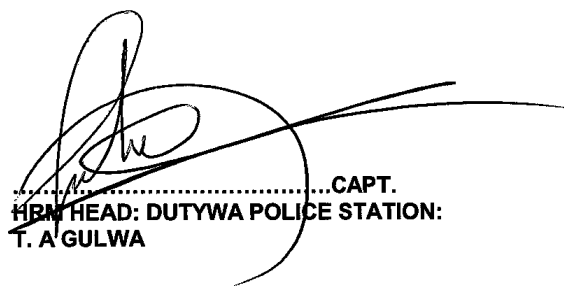
111

APPENDIX E

South African Police Service

Reference / Verwysing	
Enquiries / Navrae	CAPT. GULWA
Tel. No	(047) 489 1333
Fax	(047) 489 1439
E-mail	EC: ldutywa.cho@ saps.org.za

OFFICE OF THE STATION COMMANDER

SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE

DUTYWA

EASTERN CAPE

2016-03-18

REQUEST FOR RESEARCH: BY MR N. O. MABUNDA OF KING HINTSA COLLEGE: DUTYWA COMPUS.

1. Sir your request to do re-search at Dutywa police station has been allowed.

2. But before you start re-search you must first get permission from the station commander and explain what you want to re-search.

....CAPT.
HRM HEAD: DUTYWA POLICE STATION:
T. A GULWA

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APPENDIX F

A1 BAZAAR cc TRADING AS

Co.Reg. no: 2010/118731/23
Vat Reg. no: 4570156622

Phone No.   : 047 489 1173
Fax No.   : 047 489 1343
Email: a1bazaar@intekom.co.za

P O BOX 142
IDUTYWA
5000

IDUTYWA SPAR
Good For You

Mr N.O. MABUNDA

Dear Sir
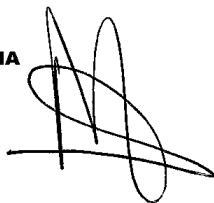
RESEARCH STUDY : NATIONAL CERTIFICATE GRADUATES

Your correspondence hand delivered to us refers.

**In principle we welcome the opportunity you present to us, that of assisting you with
your research study. We always endeavour to be of assistance to, and engage with the community
within which we trade.**

**However, we would wish for written correspondence from your Alma Mater to this regard before
permitting you to conduct your research.**

**Faithfully yours.
MTHUNZI NGOZWANA
SOLE MEMBER
IDUTYWA SPAR**

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APPENDIX G

1. Questions designed for NC(V) graduates

   Research question

   How do stakeholders perceive the employability of NC(V) graduates from a Technical and Vocational Education and Training College?

   Sub-questions

   How do NC(V) graduates from three selected programmes perceive their employment opportunities prior to their current enrolment in a NATED programme?

   1.1 Why did you enrol for the NC(V) programme?

   1.2 How did you gain work experience during your NC(V) learning period – three years?

   1.3 How would you describe your employment opportunities before you completed your NC(V)?

   1.4 Why have you enrolled for the NATED programme after completing your NC(V) studies?

   1.5 Why would you encourage someone to enrol in the NC(V) programme?

   1.6 Why would you encourage someone to enrol in the NATED programme?

2. Questions designed for lecturers

Research question

How do stakeholders perceive the employability of NC(V) graduates from a Technical and Vocational Education and Training College?

Sub-question

How do lecturers in the selected programmes view their ability to promote the employability of NC(V) graduates?

2.1 How do you link your lesson activities with the world of work?

2.2 How do you create relations with prospective employers and business around Dutywa Town?

2.3 Why would you encourage NC(V) graduates to enrol for NATED programme?

2.4 Would you share some interesting/bad experience about the NC(V) programme?

2.5 What do you think is the future of NC(V) programme?

3   Questions designed for employers

Research question

How do stakeholders perceive the employability of NC(V) graduates from a Technical and Vocational Education and Training College?

Sub-questions

How does the employment criteria of potential employers of NC(V) graduates align with the NC(V) graduate outcomes in selected programmes?

3.1 How well do you know the NC(V) programmes offered at the Dutywa Campus of the King Hintsa TVET College?

3.2 Would you prefer to employ the NATED graduates or the NC(V) graduates? Please motivate.

3.3 Would you specify your employment criteria? Please motivate.

3.4 Do you provide feedback to the Dutywa campus of King Hintsa College about the kind of graduates they supply you with as employment institution? Please motivate.

3.5 How would you describe your relationship with the Dutywa campus of King Hintsa TVET College?

APPENDIX H

Interview Schedule for Research Study Participants

Day	Date	Participants	Time Schedule	Verdict: Complete-C Not Complete-NC
1.	16/08/2016	**Participant: P-G1**	10:00 – 11:00	**C**
		P-G2	11:30 – 12:30	**C**
2.	16/08/2016	**Participant: P-G3**	13:00 – 14:00	**C**
		P-G4	15:30 – 16:30	**C**
3.	16/08/2016	**Participant: P-G5**	10:00 – 11:00	**C**
		P-G6	11:30 – 12:30	**C**
4.	16/08/2016	**Participant: P-G7**	13:00 – 14:00	**N/A**
		P-G8	15:30 – 16:30	**N/A**
5.	17/08/2016	**Participant: P-G9**	10:30 – 11:30	**N/A**
6.	17/08/2016	**Participant: P-L1**	12:00 – 13:00	**C**
		P-L2	13:30 – 14:30	**C**
7.	17/08/2016	**Participant: P-L3**	14:00 – 15:00	**C**
8.	18/08/2016	**Participant: P-S1**	10:00 – 11:00	**C**
		Participant: P-S2	11:30 – 12:30	**C**
9.	18/08/2016	**Participant: P-S3**	13:00 – 14:00	**C**
		Participant: P-S4	14:30 – 15:30	**C**

APPENDIX I

Information Sheet

Characteristics of Individual Graduates/Lecturers/Supervisors

No.	Details	Description
1.	Name	
2.	Age	
3.	Highest Grade	
4.	Qualifications	
5.	Current Studies	
6.	Extra Mural Activities	
7.	Position at Work	
9.	Importance of Research Study (participation)	
10.	Future Plans	